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THE BEDROOM DOOR WAS THROWN WIDE OPEN, AND LADY VERNON STOOD ON THE THRESHOLD.

LESBIA'S QUEST.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

NUMBER FIVE, Lester-street, N.W., was one of a row of dingy, flat-fronted little houses, each as like to the other as peas in a pod, and all very badly in want of the ministrations of painter and decorator.

The insides matched the exteriors, the rooms were small, low ceiled, shabby; and on this warm April day, with the morning sun pouring in through the windows, all the defects of paper, paint, and furniture were painfully conspicuous.

In the sitting-room of number five two girls stood watching the doctor's carriage which was just driving off from their door.

The elder may have been four-and-twenty, the other was five years younger—a tall, straight, lithe-limbed creature, with masses of gold-shot hair piled high on her head, lustrous grey eyes, and a richly-tinted complexion.

Her features were handsome, although at the present moment they were an expression of almost desperate gloom.

Her sister presented a great contrast to her, being small, and slight, and fragile, with pale blue eyes, washed-out cheeks, and that general air of languid depression peculiar to some Londoners.

"Doctor Chalmers says mother must have sea air, and port wine and jellies, and constant drives," she was saying, in a low, monotonous voice that accorded well with her appearance. "He says medicines are no good to her now; what she wants is strength, and that she will never get while she remains in London."

"Sea air, and jellies, and port wine, and constant drives," repeated the other, bitterly, as she clasped her hands together. "He might as well tell us to get the moon for her—there would be the same likelihood of our obeying him. Do you think he knows how poor we are, Jessie?"

"I don't know, but I should think he only has to look round and see it," replied Jessie, with a trembling of her pale lips.

Then she suddenly broke down altogether, and burst into an agony of tears.

"Ah, Lesbia, Lesbia! what shall we do! What can we do?" she cried, throwing herself on the hard, horse-hair-covered sofa, and burying her face in the one cushion it boasted.

Lesbia made a quick movement of half fierce impatience.

She was a girl who seldom indulged in the luxury of tears, and at the present moment they seemed to her singularly out of place.

She sat down in front of the table, supporting her chin on her hands, and staring straight before her, in a desperate endeavour to work out the difficulties of the situation.

They were hard enough in all conscience. These two girls were alone in the world, except for their mother, and she lay upstairs, dying for the want of those luxuries which to her were necessities, and with which her daughters were absolutely powerless to supply her.

Lesbia, until the last two months, had earned a small pittance by going out as daily governess, but suddenly the family in which she gave lessons had emigrated to America, and since then, although she had spared neither time nor efforts, she had been unable to get another situation.

Jessie made a little money by painting Christ-



mae cards, but it was very little indeed, only sufficient to pay the rent, and for the rest, the whole family had to subsist on an income of twenty-five pounds a year—which left no room for port wine or other invalid comforts!

While the tears were yet wet on the elder girl's cheeks, and before Lesbia had had time to come to any conclusion, an old woman wearing a mob cap, and large holland apron, entered the room, her sharp grey eyes flashing from one sister to the other, and evidently taking in every detail of their appearance.

"Your mother is wanting you, Miss Jessie. You'd better go up to her at once, and I'm thinking it 'ud be as well for you to keep with your back to the light for a bit till them red eyes of yours have had time to recover themselves."

Jessie meekly obeyed.

Jean, the old servant who had stuck to the family through all their misfortunes, was by way of being a domestic tyrant, and poor Jessie was in no mood to defy her authority just now.

As soon as the door closed behind her Jean came up to Lesbia, and laid her horny old hand on the girl's bright head.

"Don't look like that, 'love,' she said, soothingly. "Things 'll come right somehow, you take my word for it, only you must be patient, and not fret over them."

"Sometime!" Lesbia repeated, passionately. "Yes, perhaps they will, and meanwhile mother must die, because we are too poor to give her what she wants to keep her alive. Jean, I *must* get money somehow. I will go out as a housemaid if I can't find any other situation."

The old woman drew back with a movement of extreme indignation.

"Go out as a housemaid—you, one of the Tempests of Thorncroft! Why, it's out of the question, Miss Lesbia. It was bad enough for you to be a governess, but a housemaid—"

Words failed her, and she finished her sentence by an expressive pause. But Lesbia shook her head stubbornly.

"It's all very well to talk like that, but what good has my birth ever done me—or my father either, for that matter! So far as I can see, it has only been a misfortune for us all."

"If you had your rights you would be rich enough for anything—you would be down at Thorncroft, you and Miss Jessie, as its heiresses, and the people who have turned you out by fraud would be turned out themselves. And it will come yet—it will come," added Jean, impressively. "I shall see you mistress of Thorncroft before I die, I'm sure of that."

Lesbia looked up at her with awakened attention, impressed, in spite of herself, by the old woman's words, and the solemnity with which they were uttered.

"It's impossible, Jean," she said, despondently, after a moment's pause. "After all these years."

"I tell you it's not impossible, and the will will be found!" reiterated Jean, obstinately. "It's not for nothing I dream dreams, and see visions, and I say I shall see you at Thorncroft as its mistress before many years have passed over your head. Wrong has held its own for a good long time, to be sure, but after all right's right, and in the end it will gain the day!"

Lesbia was silent for a few minutes. Suddenly she said—

"Tell me the story again, Jean, from beginning to end. I have known it more or less all my life, but I'm not sure that I have ever thought of it very seriously. Poor mother always discouraged our talking of it."

"Yes, because she never thought the will was in existence. But she's wrong; you see she didn't know the facts like I did, and how could she, seeing as I'd lived at the Croft ever since I was a slip of a girl, and had known your father, Mr. Reginald, all his life! His uncle was old Sir Henry Tempest, and he was always brought up as the heir. Then Sir Henry goes and marries in his old age, and a fine madam he brought home to us all! She hated your father from the first moment she set eyes on him, and tried all she could to get him sent away. At last she succeeded, and time and glad she was when he married against his uncle's wishes, and Sir Henry

grew really angry with him, and forbade him coming to the Croft any more! After that my lady got the old gentleman to make a will leaving everything to her, and then she was satisfied. But when Sir Henry's anger cooled down he saw the injustice he had done, and it fretted him. So at last he wrote out another will with his own hand, leaving the estate to his wife for her life, and to Mr. Reginald after her, and that will I witnessed—I and old Rowlatt, the butler. Rowlatt died before his master, and Sir Henry was one day seized with a stroke, which took away his speech, but just before he died he sent for me—knowing as he could trust me, and I took care to go in while Lady Tempest was out of the way. Poor old gentleman, he could hardly speak, but his eyes said what his lips couldn't, and I knew it was the will he was thinking of. I asked him if this wasn't the case, and he nodded "Yes." Then I asked him where it was, and oh, how hard he tried to tell me! But he couldn't, the words wouldn't come. However, I says to him, 'You haven't torn up the will!' And he shook his head very positively. 'But,' I says, 'you've hid it somewhere, so as Lady Tempest shan't find it!' And he nodded "Yes." I asked him if it was in his desk, or at his lawyer's, or in his bedroom, but he shook his head each time, and just then I heard my lady's step outside. 'It's somewhere in the house!' I says, and he made the sign of 'yes' once more. Then she came in and I had to go, and that same night he died."

"But," said Lesbia, who had listened very attentively to this recital, "a search was made afterwards for the will?"

"To be sure it was, for I went and told the lawyer all I knew about it; but the will was never found, and my lady took everything, and what's more, the estates when she died went to a nephew of her's as hadn't one drop of Tempest blood in his veins. If he had had a grain of good feeling he wouldn't have took the property, or at least he'd have offered to share it with your poor father. But, no! He stuck to every penny, and stick to it he will till he's forced to give it up. But you mark my words, Miss Lesbia, the will's in the house to this day, ay, and I believe I could point to the very place where it lies hidden!"

"Do you mean this, Jean?" asked Lesbia, breathlessly, as the old woman paused.

"I do, every word of it. There's an old oak bureau in the room that used to be Sir Henry's study, and I mind one day, when I was housemaid at the Croft, and I went in to ask him about something, he says to me in his joking way,—

"If ever you have any love letters you want to hide, Jean, you bring them to me. There's a drawer in here that you might look for a hundred years without finding."

"Now, it's an odd thing, Miss Lesbia, but that saying of his went clean out of my mind, and all the times they was hunting for the will I never once thought of it. It was only the other day when I was reading a story about a secret panel that the recollection flashed upon me, and ever since I've been turning it over in my mind, and wondering how it would be possible to get to examine that bureau."

She spoke with such conviction that Lesbia was thoroughly impressed by it.

A change had come over the girl's attitude, her eyes sparkled, the colour deepened in her cheeks, she sprang to her feet, and put one hand on the old woman's shoulder.

"Then I'll tell you what I'll do, Jean. I'll go down to Thorncroft myself, and I'll search until I find the will! Yes, I mean what I say," she continued, as the old servant stared at her in amazement. "I know it'll be a difficult task, but difficulties don't frighten me, and so long as I think there is a chance of success left so long will I keep up my search!"

It was a sudden resolve, taken on the spur of the moment, but destined to have a lasting result on the fate of the girl who had conceived it.

Lesbia Tempest, young as she was, had yet an indomitable will, and romantic and far-fetched as this notion of going to her father's old home

seemed on the face of it, it took such a strong hold on her imagination that she could not rest for thinking of it, and planning the best way of carrying it into effect.

Jessie ridiculed it as a wild goose chase from which harm was much more likely to come than good. Jean, on the contrary, threw herself into it with an enthusiasm almost equalling Lesbia's own, and spent a goodly part of her time giving the young girl full particulars concerning the house at Thorncroft.

To her mother Lesbia said nothing; Mrs. Tempest had always discouraged any allusion to the loss of the Thorncroft property, doubtless thinking that to dwell on it could not possibly have an effect other than bad on the two girls. Her own belief was that the will had been found and destroyed years ago by Lady Tempest herself—an unscrupulous woman, whose love of gold had passed into a proverb.

Old Jean still had a piece and her husband living in the vicinity of the Croft, and in accordance with Lesbia's instructions, she wrote to them asking for information regarding the present owner.

He was the nephew of the late Lady Tempest, a man of between fifty and sixty, named Chandos, and was far from being popular with his neighbours.

He had one son, and his wife was more or less an invalid. As a rule a companion lived with her, but at the present moment she was without one.

"If I could only get the situation!" exclaimed Lesbia, as the letter was read to her, and then an idea struck her, and she counted out the slender sum of money left in her purse. "Yes, there was just enough to pay for an advertisement, and she thereupon sat down and wrote one out, describing herself in such terms as she thought would be likely to appeal to Mrs. Chandos. She had to wait a few days until the advertisement appeared in the *Times*, after which she marked it, and sent it down to Mrs. Chandos, writing the address in a feigned hand.

"She will think some friend has seen it, and has forwarded it to her," she said to Jean, who was her confidante. "Now if I am lucky, I shall hear from her in the course of the next twenty-four hours or so, and then—Thorncroft and victory!"

It really seemed as if Fortune favoured the boldness of her plans. Her carefully adjusted bait took, and two days later she had a letter from Mrs. Chandos asking for "references and further particulars." These were sent down, and at the end of a week Lesbia Tempest found herself engaged as companion to the mistress of Thorncroft at a yearly salary of forty pounds. One important change, however, was effected. She went to her new situation, not as Miss Tempest, but under her mother's maiden name of Talbot. There were valid reasons why her real patronymics should, for the present at any rate, be kept a secret.

CHAPTER II.

It was a lovely May afternoon when Lesbia found herself at the little station where she had to alight for her new home. A dog cart was waiting for her, drawn by a rakish looking chesnut, who set his ears back, and adged very considerably while she got in. Lesbia was not used to horses, and these performances had a somewhat disturbing effect on her mind.

"I hope he's—quiet," she faltered to the groom, who treated her to a contemptuously patronising smile as he took his place beside her.

"He's all right, miss, don't you be afraid. A bit skittish, perhaps, but bless you, it's only his fun, he don't mean nothing."

Lesbia thought "his fun" highly objectionable, for no sooner did the groom touch him with his whip than the animal started off at a quick gallop, which grew swifter and swifter, until it was soon patent to her that the man had lost all control over him. On and on dashed the horse, his hoofs making a dull echo from the ground as

they struck it, while the fields and hedgerows seemed to fly past, and Lesbia, pale and trembling, had to cling for dear life to the side of the cart, which threatened every moment to overturn.

The man pulled with all his might, until suddenly—snap went the reins, and then he seemed to realize for the first time that there might be danger. On ahead the road made a sharp turn to the right, and as ill luck would have it there were two high banks of stones on either side, kept there for repairing the highway.

"He'll run bang into them!" muttered the groom, "and then we shall be upset to a dead certainty. I almost think it would be better to jump out before we get there."

Lesbia thought so too, and yet—the cart was a very high one, and the effects of a fall from it might be dangerous, even fatal. A shudder ran through her. Life was very sweet, and she was too young to think of losing it without agony. Was this then to be the end of her bright dreams of success, of her efforts to save her mother's life, of her ambitious visions of finding her great uncle's will, and releasing her dear ones from the sordid existence of poverty, which had been their lot for so long?

She looked round helplessly. The cart awayed, unsteadily from side to side, while the horse thundered along, raising a thick cloud of dust as he went. The turn in the road came nearer and nearer. Lesbia was no coward, but she grew sick and faint as she thought of the fate threatening her. With a supreme effort she gathered her energies together, intending to follow the groom's advice and jump out, when quite suddenly a man dashed forward in front of the horse's head, seized hold of the reins, and hung on like grim death until the panting and frightened animal was brought to a standstill.

The groom sprang out, and then the gentleman who had so opportunely appeared came to Lesbia's side and lifted her to the ground. She was still so giddy that she could not stand alone, and involuntarily she caught at his shoulder for support.

"That's right," he said, kindly, "lean on me. I expect you have had a fright. Come and sit down on the grass, and I'll see if I can't get you some water from yonder cottage."

"I shall be all right presently," she said with a faint attempt at a smile, "and I don't think I shall need the water. Yes, I confess I was frightened, I am not accustomed to horses, and I didn't quite know what was going to happen, although I anticipated something unpleasant."

"It might have been very unpleasant indeed," he returned, grimly. Then, he added to the groom, "What on earth you wanted to bring Donovan out to-day for I can't imagine. You know quite well that at the best of times he's uncertain, and he's been in the stables since Monday."

"Mr. Tempest said I was to bring him, sir, to meet Miss Talbot. I told him Donovan was rather fresh, but he wouldn't listen to me."

A frown crossed the young man's brow, but he merely shrugged his shoulders.

Lesbia, meanwhile, had cast a rapid glance at him which took in the fact that he was tall, and young, and handsome, with candid blue eyes and a tanned complexion telling of foreign suns.

"I must introduce myself," he said, smilingly intercepting her glance. "I am Captain Chandos, the son of the lady to whom you are going—for I presume you are the Miss Talbot my mother is expecting."

He was surprised at the suddenness with which Lesbia drew herself away from his supporting arm.

A quick change came over her face, which grew set and stern, for was not this man the son of her father's supplanter, and had she not come to Thorncroft with the purpose of wresting from him the heritage he had so unjustly taken possession of?

"Yes," she said, coldly, "I am Miss Talbot." But she looked away from him, and the gratitude that had shone in her eyes before was now replaced by an expression bordering on hauteur, which rather mystified Captain Chandos, who

was not at all accustomed to coldness from ladies. In effect he was an immense favourite with the fair sex, and they had taken pains to assure him of the fact.

"The Croft is about a mile away," he said, after a moment's uncomfortable pause. "Do you think you can walk that distance, Miss Talbot?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"I thought, perhaps, your journey might have tired you."

"If it had done so I should still be equal to a walk of one mile."

"I am glad to hear it. All ladies are not so strong, and the nerves of many would have been upset by your recent experiences."

"I am not nervous, Captain Chandos."

"So it seems, Miss Talbot; I congratulate you on the fact." He bowed—ironically, as it seemed to Lesbia. "If you will allow me I will walk with you and show you the way over the fields, while Brooks leads the horse home by the road."

Lesbia had no alternative but to accept his escort, though she chafed inwardly at the necessity. She had come to Thorncroft with the full intention of hating its master and its master's son, and it was a little disconcerting that at the very outset of her experiences the latter should have risked his life to save hers, thus forcing her into an attitude of friendliness that made her feel like a hypocrite.

He went forward, and opened a gate for her to pass through. As he joined her he pointed back at it.

"I was sitting on there when I heard the dog cart come tearing along. At first I couldn't make out what was up, but as soon as I recognised Donovan I guessed how matters stood. He is an ill-tempered brute, and if I had my way I'd get rid of him to-morrow."

"It was very brave of you to stop him," replied Lesbia, stiffly. "I feel I owe you a debt of gratitude that words can hardly pay."

"Nothing of the sort. On the contrary, it is we who owe you an apology for sending such a horse to the station to meet you," he replied, easily, as he switched the heads of the daisies with his cane, stealing every now and then a glance at the girl at his side.

How tall and straight she was, and how gracefully her head was set on her shoulders! The oval of her cheek, too, was very perfect, and its colouring was as pure and bright as the carnation he wore in his buttonhole.

Yes, she was certainly charmingly pretty, but he wished her voice and manner were not quite so freezing.

As they passed through the fields, where the grass was growing long and lush, ready for the mower's scythe, he pointed out to her various places of interest on the way.

"I suppose you are a stranger to this part of the world," he said presently.

"I have never been here before in my life."

"Ah, then, everything has the charm of novelty for you. I, on the contrary, know every landmark for miles round."

"I suppose so."

"There is Thorncroft," he added, pointing to a stack of twisted chimneys, rising from amongst pointed gable ends. "It is a pretty place. You must forgive my saying so, but it is my home, and I am proud of it."

Lesbia drew up her stately neck with an unconscious movement.

Yes, it was his home, but by rights it should be hers and her sister's. Morally he had not the shadow of a claim to it, though the law gave him one.

She did not speak again, and he also was silent, chilled, in spite of himself, by her manner. He led her through an avenue to the front door of the Croft, and thence to a fine oak-panelled hall and upstairs to a bright, sunny south room, where a lady of middle age, who had once been pretty, but who now looked worn and faded, was reclining on a couch, to which a tea table was drawn up.

"Mother, I have brought Miss Talbot to you," he said, and Lesbia noticed how his voice softened as he addressed Mrs. Chandos. "I am afraid she

is rather tired, for the day is hot, and she has had a dusty journey from town. She'll be glad of some tea. I'll ring to have it brought up."

Lesbia tried to speak quietly and naturally in answer to Mrs. Chandos's greeting, but she was not quite sure whether she succeeded.

However, the elder lady was not particularly observant, and if she noticed anything strange in her new companion's manner she was quite ready to put it down to shyness.

She was a gentle, sweet-tempered woman, standing very much in awe of her husband, and simply worshipping her son, who, on his part, was devoted to her.

It was odd to see him take his place at the tea table, and manipulate the cups and saucers quite with the air of being used to doing it.

"Since my mother's last companion left, I have taken to pour out the tea," he said, laughing, as he met Lesbia's eye. "I shall give up my place to you to-morrow, Miss Talbot."

He made no allusion to the accident that had so nearly happened, and the part he had taken in it, and Lesbia, following his example, preserved a similar reticence.

Before tea was quite over there strolled into the room a tall, red-faced, dark-haired man, with a loud voice, and overbearing manner, who proved to be Mr. Tempest.

"Having tea again! By Jove, it seems to me you do nothing but drink that rubbish all day long," he observed, amiably, nodding unceremoniously to Lesbia, and seating himself in an arm chair opposite his wife. "I have just had a letter from Lady Vernon. She says she'll come down the beginning of next week, so you'd better write—or get Miss Talbot to write—to two or three other people to come and meet her. Here's a list of those I want invited."

"But I'm going to town next week, sir," said Captain Chandos, looking up from his tea cup.

"You're going to do nothing of the sort," returned his father, gruffly. "You're going to stay at home and make yourself agreeable to Lady Vernon, that's what you are going to do. What the deuce else d'ye think I've invited her for?"

The young officer seemed on the point of retorting rather warmly, when his mother placed a restraining hand on his arm, looking at him at the same time with her imploring blue-eyes—so like his own, until tears had washed the brightness from them!

Soon afterwards Lesbia was taken to her room, thinking over this little glimpse of family life that had been afforded her. Mr. Chandos was evidently a species of domestic tyrant; his wife was gentle and yielding, and Captain Chandos, out of affection for her, did his best to keep in with his father.

Lesbia clasped her hands together in passionate wrath as she walked up and down the limits of the room, thinking of his gallant behaviour of the afternoon, and trying to make out, to her own heart, that he had really done no more than any other man would have done under similar circumstances. Curiously enough, she almost succeeded in persuading herself that he had actually wronged her in thus coming to her assistance. Oh, if she could only find some way of paying the debt she owed him and thus crying "quits."

"If I find the will I will offer to make him an allowance—a good one," she said to herself; and then her thoughts took a new turn, and she drew out a letter of directions written by Jean before she left home, in which the old servant had given a description of the various rooms. Lesbia wondered whether she would have a chance of getting to the study that day.

As it happened she had not, for she was kept with Mrs. Chandos writing letters until evening, and after dinner she was requested to sing. She had a lovely contralto voice, which, although it had not been specially trained, she knew how to manage perfectly. While she was at the piano, Captain Chandos came quietly into the room and took a seat in such a position as to command a good view of the performer.

Lesbia was far from being naturally nervous, and yet the sense of his proximity had the effect

of making her feel so. As soon as she could she closed the piano.

"Thank you, Miss Talbot," said the chate-laine, warmly; then turning to her son, she added, "Miss Talbot has a charming voice, hasn't she, Ronald?"

"Charming indeed. But she would not give me much opportunity of enjoying it. I hope I shall be more fortunate on another occasion."

"My son is passionately fond of music," observed Mrs. Chandos.

"Indeed!" responded Lesbia, frigidly in-different to the Captain's likes and dislikes.

"So I hope you won't mind his listening to your singing in an evening," added the lady, half playfully.

The young companion merely bowed, but Captain Chandos, who was watching her, decided that somehow or other the idea was distasteful to her.

"I expect Miss Talbot is tired," he said. "She had better go to her room, mother, and you and I will have our game at piquet."

Lesbia had an uncomfortable idea that this suggestion was made out of consideration for her, but she tried hard to ignore it. She was doing her best to find grounds for hating this young man, and she felt it an injury that he would give her no reason for doing so!

CHAPTER III.

It was a strange sensation for Lesbia to find herself under the roof of her father's old home, masquerading under a false name, as companion to its present mistress. She was too excited to sleep much that night, but in the morning she was up betimes, and wandering about the grounds before breakfast, admiring the neatness with which they were kept, and wondering, with a beating heart, if the time would ever come when she could bring her mother down here, and install her as mistress.

"You are an early riser, Miss Talbot," said a voice behind her, as she stood on the path looking across the dewy expanse of lawn, which was shut in by a belt of shrubs—lilacs, laburnum, guelder rose and syringa, all helping to scent the air with their blossomy fragrance. Turning round hastily she found herself confronted by Captain Chandos.

The young officer looked singularly handsome in the clear morning light, in his grey tweed suit, with a straw hat on his short cut curls. Even Lesbia was forced to admit this, although she did so grudgingly enough.

"I hope I don't offend against Mr. Chandos' rules by walking through the gardens before breakfast," she said, with that stiffness in her voice that he noticed always came there when he addressed her.

"Oh dear no! what could possibly put such an idea in your head? The gardens were certainly intended to be walked in, otherwise what would be the good of them? Have you seen the conservatories?"

"Not yet."

"Then let me show them to you. They are rather a hobby of my father's. He will boast to you that there are no others in the county to hold a candle to them. I don't go so far as that myself, but I will confess I think them hard to beat. Come along, this way."

It was difficult to resist the gay fascination of his manner; nevertheless if Lesbia could have found an excuse for refusing she would have made it.

But one did not occur to her, and without remark she followed him into the great domed glass house, with its wealth of floral treasures—its soft yellow Marechale Niel roses, its pink and white azaleas, its waxy stephanotis, and great white lilies that made the air heavy with their perfume.

"Well!" said the young man, watching her beautiful face as she looked round. "Do you think my father has a right to be proud of his conservatory?"

"No, I do not!"

The answer came with a swift bitterness that

surprised him, and the moment the words had passed her lips Lesbia could have bitten her tongue through for her foolishness in uttering them.

"I mean," she said hastily, with a bungling attempt to cover her imprudence, "if Mr. Chandos did not build the houses himself he has hardly a right to be proud of them."

"But how do you know he did not build them?"

She knew it very well, for Jean had often told her how Sir Henry had planned them, and watched their erection himself, with her father—then a little boy—at his side.

But this she could hardly repeat to Captain Chandos.

She took refuge in silence, and seemed intent on examining one of the golden hearted lilies, pretending she had not heard the question.

He meanwhile reached up, and broke off a spray of stephanotis.

"Will you accept this Miss Talbot, to wear in your waistband?"

She took it reluctantly, and with a murmured word of thanks almost too low to reach his ears.

At that moment, to her relief, but to her companion's evident embarrassment, no less a person than Mr. Chandos, or "the Squire" as he preferred being called, appeared on the threshold, looking from one to the other with lowering brows.

"What brings you out here, philandering with your mother's companion?" he demanded, as soon as Lesbia was out of hearing.

"I was not aware I was 'philandering.' My own opinion is that Miss Talbot would be a difficult person to philander with," returned the young officer, carelessly, as he left the conservatory.

"Difficult or not, she's a handsome girl, and I have no doubt she knows it as well as you do. But mind, I won't have any flirtation with her—do you understand?"

"Did you ever intend having any flirtation with her?" said Ronald, innocently, and purposely putting a wrong construction on his father's words. "I should have thought your days for that sort of thing had gone by."

"Confound your impertinence, sir! You know quite well what I mean, although you pretend to be so infernally stupid. You are to marry Lady Vernon—I have made up my mind on that point, and it'll be the worse for you if you attempt to thwart me. I saw you giving the companion some flowers, and that you had no business to do."

Captain Chandos came to a standstill, and pointed to a spray of stephanotis lying on the gravel before him.

"There are the flowers. You see how little she values them. With that proof before your eyes I think your anxiety on the subject may be allayed."

The Squire grunted, and both men went in to breakfast, Ronald with an upright crease in his brow that told of bewilderment.

In point of fact Lesbia puzzled as much as she charmed him; there was a mystery about her that he failed to fathom; he could not class her with other girls he had met, and yet he had never met one who attracted him so greatly.

During the next two days he saw little of her, for his mother was unwell, and claimed her attention from morning till night. Lesbia was an excellent nurse, unwearied in her care for the invalid, and with a sort of magnetism in her touch that strong natures occasionally possess, and which did a good deal towards soothing poor Mrs. Chandos' weak nerves. But it followed that as she was so much with the lady of the house she had no time to prosecute her own special search for the missing will, and Sunday came without her having found one single opportunity of paying a visit to the study, and so getting a view of the oak bureau.

On that afternoon she was sitting by Mrs. Chandos' couch, fanning her with a palm leaf fan, when the young soldier came in. He noticed directly that she had lost a good deal of the brilliant colour he had so much admired when he

first saw her, and, moreover, there were dark circles under her beautiful eyes.

"Why, mother, Miss Talbot, looks more of an invalid than you do, now," he said, cheerfully. "I am afraid she has had broken rest lately. Don't you think it would do her good to have a run in the park while I take her place and fan you?"

Mrs. Chandos was not a selfish woman, and now that her attention was drawn to her young companion's altered appearance she was quick to reproach herself with being its cause.

"You have been too good to me," she said, touching Lesbia's hand affectionately with her pale white fingers; "you must do as Ronald says, and have an hour in the fresh air. I shall go to sleep if left to myself, I think."

She would not hear of her son's remaining with her, and accordingly he went downstairs, and was standing on the terrace when Lesbia appeared. It was a warm afternoon, late in May; a slumbrous Sabbath stillness lay on the grounds, broken only by the distant sounds of church bells. In the house, too, the same silence reigned, and Lesbia, as she came down, wondered in what room its master was taking his afternoon siesta. She expressed this wonder to Captain Chandos as she was passing by.

"Oh, my father has gone over to look at some prize sheep, or pigs, or something, on one of his farms," replied the young man; "he went out directly after luncheon, and I don't suppose he'll be back before seven or eight o'clock."

Lesbia came to a sudden pause.

"And you, Captain Chandos, what are you going to do this afternoon?"

He reddened slightly, and looked down at the small holes he was industriously making in the gravel with the end of his stick.

"I was thinking of going for a walk," he answered at last, but he did not add that he had hoped she would be his companion.

"Then I will sit on this seat just by the drawing-room window, and rest in the sunshine while you are away," she said, proceeding towards a rustic bench, while he had no alternative but to saunter off alone for his promised stroll.

Lesbia watched him till he was out of sight, then, with one glance round to make sure she was unobserved, she ran swiftly back into the house, and straight to the study, whose whereabouts she knew, though she had not yet been inside it. It was a long, low, rather dark room, furnished with book-shelves, and old oak, just as Jean had described it—indeed, it had remained unchanged since old Sir Henry's death, for it was a room very little used by the present inhabitants of the Croft. Against the wall stood the old oak bureau, black with age, and looking sadly in want of "elbow-grease" to polish it up.

Lesbia's heart beat rapidly as she stood in the middle of the room gazing at it. Jean had said a flap let down in front, and inside the flap was a double row of drawers, and a small cupboard or recess. The secret drawer she believed to be within this recess, and the question was, would she have time to examine it before the return of Captain Chandos or his father?

It was now between three and four o'clock—a time when she might calculate with certainty on not being disturbed by the servants, who were either out walking or enjoying their Sunday afternoon leisure in their own domain. Lesbia determined to risk it, and thereupon drew from her pocket a bunch of keys with which she had provided herself before she left London, and carefully tried them, one after another in the lock. At last one fitted, but at the same moment a shadow darkened the window, and she glanced up with a half-stifled shriek, to behold Captain Chandos looking in through the half open casement.

Never in her life had the girl felt herself at such a complete disadvantage. In spite of her belief in the honesty of her purpose, she had all the sensations of a criminal detected in the act of theft.

But a moment later her self-possession partly returned to her, and though she still trembled, and her lips and cheeks were both white, she contrived to find her voice.

"You are back soon, Captain Chandos."

"Oh, it is you, then, Miss Talbot! My eyes are so blinded by the sunlight that I can hardly make out anything with distinctness in this dark room. Why didn't you stay outside?"

"Because I thought I should like to explore the house. I have not been all over it yet."

Her voice was still unsteady. She wondered whether he would notice it.

"Oh, if that is the case, I'll be your cicerone. Shall I make a flying leap through this window, or come round and in at the door in orthodox fashion?"

"Come round by all means," she rejoined hastily, and as he disappeared she snatched the tell-tale bunch of keys from the bureau, and hid them in her dress. "That was a narrow escape," she said to herself. "I must be more cautious next time."

She fancied Ronald looked at her rather searchingly when he entered, but his manner was just the same as usual, and finally she came to the conclusion that he had not seen the keys in her hand, and had no suspicion of the purpose with which she had entered the study. In this she was not altogether right, for although he was as he told her, dazzled by the sunshine, he had yet fancied she was banding over the lock of the bureau when he first looked through the window, and more than this, he was keen-sighted enough to observe the embarrassment of her manner, and the trembling of her voice, both of which betrayed unmistakable agitation.

"Now, what the deuce could she have been up to?" he asked himself, when he was smoking a quiet cigar on the terrace later on. "She certainly is the queerest girl I ever set eyes on—and the most beautiful!"

CHAPTER IV.

DURING the rest of the day Lesbia was in a fever of impatience, for she had resolved that after the household had retired she would make another attempt to find the secret drawer. Never had the hours passed so slowly; but at last Mrs. Chandos dismissed her for the night, and then she stayed in her room until all sounds of activity ceased and the last light was put out. After that she waited another half hour, and by this time it was one o'clock, and a complete silence had fallen on the Croft. Then, providing herself with a box of matches and a taper, and gathering the folds of her dress closely about her, she stole softly downstairs in a darkness only illumined by faint moonbeams that forced their way through the stained glass windows of the hall.

It was easy enough to find the study and to unlock the door, but try as she would the young girl could not get rid of that feeling of guilt which had fastened on her since she was so nearly detected that same afternoon.

However, once inside the room, she slipped the bolt of the door and began her task in a more business-like way than the first time she essayed it.

As we have said before, one of the keys fitted, and the flap of the bureau fell down revealing the rows of drawers and the central cupboard as described by Jean. Unfortunately the cupboard in its turn was locked, and all of Lesbia's keys were too small to fit it. One after another she tried them, but always with the same result, and at last she left off in despair.

The only thing she could do would be to write to Jean to send her another bunch of smaller keys, and also some instrument for forcing the lock in case the keys failed, and then to try again.

The stable clock struck two as she was leaving the study. She stood for a moment with the handle of the door in her hand listening to the strokes as they vibrated on the night silence. Then, as ill-luck would have it, a sudden gust of wind from the upper part of the hall window, which had inadvertently been left open, caught the door and slammed it to with a bang which echoed loudly through the quiet house.

At first Lesbia was uncertain whether to remain downstairs and hide in case any one came to find out the origin of the noise or to run back

to her own room, where—if she reached it without being seen—she would evade all suspicion.

She finally decided on the latter course, and swiftly and noiselessly fled up the staircase, her heart meanwhile beating so loudly that she almost fancied it could be heard in the stillness.

Like a flash of light she passed through the patch of moonbeams that came through the tall gothic window, and fell on the oak stairs; but when she gained the top of the staircase, which was very dark, she ran straight into the arms of someone who was standing there, apparently waiting for her.

The arms closed round her, warmly, passionately, she was drawn forward, and held against a heart beating almost as loudly as her own, then lips pressed themselves on hers in one long kiss whose memory would stay with her as long as life remained.

All this took place in less than a moment, and before she realized what had happened she found herself released, and standing alone in the darkness, blushing, dazed, bewildered, and not quite certain that she had not been dreaming.

Finally she got back to her room, and tried to reason out what had befallen her.

Her cheeks were blazing with anger and indignation, all her spirit was in revolt against the humiliation that had been put upon her.

Of course it was Captain Chandos who had embraced her—her, Lesbia Tempest, to whom not even a thought of passion had ever yet come, who had held herself pure and aloof as some mountain flower in snow-clad and inaccessible heights!

Oh, it was terrible, terrible—and the worst part of it was she was not in a position to resent it.

Her first impulse was to leave the Croft at once, but the thought of her mother, dying of poverty in the stuffy little London street, deterred her.

No, she would remain on until her mission was ended, and when once the will was in her hands, she would let Ronald Chandos know how she hated and despised him.

Meanwhile her only alternative would be to ignore the episode altogether, and treat it as if it had never been. And at this point of her reflections poor Lesbia threw herself on her knees at the bedside, and buried her face in her hands while hot tears of mingled pride and mortification coursed down her cheeks.

The next day she wrote to Jean, and the following afternoon a party of guests arrived at the Croft.

Lesbia watched them from a corner of one of the mullioned windows, and found herself taking a special interest in a *petite*, fair-haired, dark-eyed little woman, exquisitely dressed, and rather "got-up," whom Roland was helping to alight from the Victoria.

This, as she afterwards learned, was Lady Vernon, a young widow who was very well off, and who, report whispered, was very much in love with Captain Chandos.

Certainly he paid her a good deal of attention—or at least, Lesbia fancied he did, as she peeped out of her corner at them.

He assuredly held her hand longer than there was any necessity for doing while he assisted her from the carriage, and she rewarded him by a long upward glance from her darkly fringed eyes that made Lesbia feel quite angry—why, she could hardly have told.

Curiously enough, she felt very lonely and "out of it" as she sat there listening to the gay chatter of voices, and the silvery echoes of rippling laughter which seemed to come from a world in which she had no part.

A longing to be down there amongst that cheerful throng, to take her part in the badinage and the gaiety, came over her; but as soon as she recognised the thought she resolutely put it from her, and crept back to her room to try and occupy herself with some work.

But before she had been there long a summons from Mrs. Chandos called her to come and pour out the tea for the visitors in the hall, and with one hasty glance in the mirror she went down—a tall, slender, graceful girl, simply dressed in grey tweed, which, however, fitted well, and showed to

perfection the supple curve of bust and waist, and brought out in strong relief the glowing carnations of her complexion.

Lady Vernon, who was sitting in an arm chair, over which a big tiger skin was thrown, talking to Captain Chandos, glanced up at her entrance, and treated her to a long stare through her tortoise shell handled eyeglasses, as she took her seat in front of the tea tray.

"The governess I suppose!" she said in her languid, silvery drawl. "But it cannot be, seeing that there are no children here. Who is she?"

The question was perfectly audible to Lesbia, but his answer was spoken in too low a tone for her to distinguish it.

Her cheeks burned more than ever, and she drew up her neck with the half haughty gesture Ronald had learned to know.

How she hated her position, and longed to be released from it!

But she had to sit there for another half hour and listen to the lively conversation that went on around her, while she was conscious all the time of the handsome young officer by Lady Vernon's side, and the very pronounced flirtation that was in process between them.

"I think the most despicable character under Heaven is that of a male flirt!" she said to herself quite viciously, after the guests had dispersed to their various rooms, and she was left alone at the deserted tea table.

And then, once more, she seemed to feel the touch of warm soft lips on hers in the darkness, and a strange sort of thrill ran through her veins—a thrill of disgust she would have told you.

"Resting from your labours, Miss Talbot?" said Ronald, returning unexpectedly. "You have been kept pretty busy, haven't you?"

She got up hastily, without replying, and with the intention of making her escape, but he stood before her, barring her way.

"Wait a minute, if you please. I have something to say to you, and you will never give me an opportunity of saying it. By the way, Miss Talbot, how is it you are always at such pains to avoid me?"

She raised her eyes in indignant protest, but they fell directly they met his. What splendid eyes his were—keen and blue, and flashing like an unheated sabre.

There was something, too, in their depths that seemed like a new revelation to Lesbia.

"Have I offended you in any way?" he went on, coming a step nearer, and bending his handsome head to look down at her. "If so"—and his voice grew more earnest—"I want to tell you that I regret it most bitterly, and that I will do anything to regain your good opinion—yes, anything. Do you believe me, Miss Talbot?"

She understood that he was declaring his penitence, in veiled language it is true, for what had happened the other night, but there was no softening in her towards him.

This time she met his gaze steadily, and there was infinite scorn in her lovely lustrous eyes.

"It matters very little whether I believe you or not, Captain Chandos."

"Indeed, Miss Talbot, you mistake. It matters very much indeed—at least, to me. Once more I ask you, will you, if I have offended you, forgive me?"

"I do not understand you," she replied, coldly.

"Let me pass, please."

He sighed, and bit his lip under his tawny moustache.

"You are hard on me," he said.

"I cannot help my nature."

"But I feel sure sure it is not your nature to be hard—on other people."

"Perhaps because other people have given me no cause for hardness."

"Which means that you think I have? Well I am very sorry, I wish I could assure you of my penitence. Don't you understand a sudden yielding to a great temptation?"

"I do not."

"In that case I am afraid I appeal in vain."

"Which is a new experience for you, Captain Chandos!" exclaimed a merry, mocking voice, as Lady Vernon, divested of her out-door garments, came tripping across the hall. "I am afraid I am interrupting a *tête-à-tête*. You must accept my

apologies. Now tell me," she added, laying her hand on his arm, as Lesbia, covered with confusion made her escape, "what were you saying to that extremely pretty girl?"

"Do you call her pretty?" he asked, the dark red deepening under his tan, while he mentally cursed his own folly for laying himself open to such a snubbing as Lesbia had undoubtedly administered to him.

"Certainly I do. And you—aren't you of my opinion?"

"I don't know. Yes, I suppose she is good-looking or at least one might think so if the Queen of Beauty did not happen to be by," he said, pointing the compliment by a significant glance. She shook her curly golden head and laughed.

"Now you are trying to evade me by flattery, but it won't do, sir! You are to tell me what the appeal was that you have been making in vain."

But in her endeavour to extract this from him she was hardly successful. Ronald was by no means a novice in the art of evading awkward queries, and he had not the very smallest intention of confiding in the golden-haired widow. Perhaps this may have had something to do with the dislike that Lady Vernon took for Lesbia, in whom, maybe, she saw a possible rival, for there was no denying that the girl was beautiful, and beauty was a power that her ladyship was far from under-estimating.

That same evening the young companion was told she would be expected in the drawing-room after dinner to accompany songs on the piano, if not to sing herself. The message put Lesbia in something of a flutter, for her wardrobe was of the scantiest, and she was provided with no better evening dress than an old black silk that had been her mother's, and whose palmiest days were long since past. She was standing looking at it rather mournfully when a knock at the door was followed by the entrance of a servant.

"My mistress sent these to you, miss," she said, depositing on the dressing table a mass of soft, yellow roses, and maiden-hair fern. "She hopes you will wear them to-night."

Lesbia gave a little cry of delight as she deftly began weaving fern and flowers into a long wreath, which, when she had put on the black silk—the neck of which she had cut low—she arranged in her corsage, leaving one dainty bud for her hair, and certainly she had no reason to be ashamed of the reflection given back by the mirror when her toilette was complete. Her gown might be shabby, and jewels she had none, but there was a bloom on her cheek a duchess might have envied, there was a light in her eyes outshining the radiance of diamonds, while her hair, soft and wavy, and arranged in a coronet of plaits round the small, graceful head, needed no other adornment than the yellow rose with its shining, green leaves. People all turned to look at her as she entered the drawing-room—except indeed, the Squire himself, who had declared it "great nonsense" to have her in at all.

Lady Vernon, wearing a wondrous robe of pale green silk, trimmed with feamy lace, and long wreaths of coral and sea weed, and with a string of pearls twisted in the coils of her golden hair, looked like some siren of old. And, so far as could be judged, she had thrown her spells very successfully round Ronald Chandos, for he remained by her side until she was asked to sing, and then he went with her to the piano, where Lesbia was already seated in order to accompany the song—an airy little French *chanson* very well suited to her thin but not unmusical voice.

After she had finished amid a little murmur of thanks, Mrs. Chandos asked Lesbia to sing, and the first moment the girl's rich, clear notes rang through the room, an appreciative silence followed. Never had she sung so well, and never had she tried so hard to put forth all her powers. As she concluded a perfect shower of applause greeted her, and for the life of her she could not prevent herself from casting one quick glance over to the couch where Lady Vernon and Ronald were seated. The contrast between the performance of the two women was inevitable, and more than that, the pretty widow was quite aware of her own inferiority. She bit her lips

hard as she waved her big ostrich feather fan to and fro.

"Your mother's companion has mistaken her vocation; she ought to have been an actress," she said, spitefully. "There is something theatrical both in her manner and in her singing."

"Do you think so? I never observed it," returned Ronald, more than half suspecting the feeling of jealousy that had prompted the remark, and his eyes rested for a moment on the proudly graceful head of Lesbia, who shortly afterwards left the room with Mrs. Chandos. She remained with the invalid lady for a couple of hours, reading to her when she was in bed, and bathing her brows with eau de Cologne until she fell asleep, then she stole gently out, and went down the corridor to her own apartment. On her way she met Ronald, who had come to his dressing-room to exchange his coat for a smoking jacket.

"Good-night," he said, holding out his hand. "Good-night," she returned, with downcast eyes, and pretending not to notice his outstretched fingers.

"What, you won't be friends with me even yet? However, I am glad to see you do not disdain to wear my flowers."

"Your flowers?"

He smiled mischievously.

"Yes, I took the liberty of sending you the roses."

"But I understood they came from your mother."

"I made use of my mother's name, certainly, but that was merely a little figure of speech to make sure of your acceptance. I hope you won't count that against me as a sin."

"It was a deceit."

"A harmless one, surely! Ah!" as she took the roses from her bosom—"you surely will not punish the poor flowers for my faults. Besides, they have fulfilled their mission. Whatever you may do now you can't alter the fact of your having worn them during the evening."

A bud fell from her fingers on the carpet. He stooped and picked it up, putting it carefully away in his pocket-book.

"I shall keep it, Miss Talbot, in memory of a victory," he said, smiling at her with the gay fascination she found it hard to resist, and he stood watching her as she hurriedly disappeared down the corridor.

CHAPTER V.

MR. CHANDOS' guests could not complain that their host did not look after them well in the way of providing them with plenty of amusement. The day after their arrival a picnic was arranged, and the next day a dinner party; the following morning they all started out on a river expedition, and every evening there was music. Lesbia had her share in these gaieties, inasmuch as she always accompanied Mrs. Chandos to the drawing-room, and was invariably asked to sing at night; but all the while she felt painfully aware of her position, and the fact that though she was treated with politeness by certain members of the party she was looked upon as an outsider by all—except, indeed, Ronald himself, who was almost punctilious in the tone of distant courtesy he had lately adopted towards her.

No one had the same power as Lady Vernon of making the girl understand that she was merely accepted on sufferance, and this power the fair-haired widow used to the utmost. There could be no doubt that she had taken a dislike to the beautiful companion, and she was the kind of woman with whom dislikes were more apt to be active rather than passive. Meanwhile matters between her and Captain Chandos were progressing greatly to the satisfaction of the Squire, who was extremely anxious to obtain Lady Vernon for a daughter-in-law. In addition to her birth and position she was supposed to be extremely wealthy, and no man more fully appreciated the charms of money than Mr. Chandos.

A week had passed by since Lesbia had written to Jean for the keys, and she was

growing anxious at their non arrival. At last they came, and with them a letter from Jean explaining that Mrs. Tempest had been worse, and that she and Jessie had taken it in turns to be with her. The sick woman was now better, but both the nurses seemed to be worn out. This letter had the effect of rousing Lesbia to fresh energy; lately she had found herself thinking more of her immediate surroundings than of the purpose that had brought her to Thorncroft. She determined to search the bureau that very night, but an event happened that entirely upset her calculations, and nearly threw her into despair.

As she was passing through the smaller corridor downstairs she saw a couple of men engaged in moving some piece of furniture from the study, a proceeding that was watched over by the house-keeper, Mrs. Wilson. A second glance told Lesbia that this piece of furniture was nothing more nor less than the oak bureau.

Her heart fell. Was it possible the Squire had sold the bureau, and it was in process of being carted away beyond her reach?

"What is happening?" she asked the house-keeper, breathlessly.

"We're clearing the room for the dance to-night."

"But I didn't know there was to be a dance."

"No more didn't no one else," responded Mrs. Wilson, with a good-natured smile on her broad red face. "It's a whim of Lady Vernon's and it's to be an impromptu affair. All the same, I expect there'll be a goodish lot of people here. This room is to be used for refreshments, so we want as little furniture in it as possible."

"Where is the bureau going to be taken to?"

"You'd never guess. Why, it's to be put in Lady Vernon's dressing-room. Her ladyship has took a fancy to it, and says she'd like to have it to do her writing on, so the Squire has given it her, out and out, and it's to be in the dressing room while she's here, and she's to take it away with her when she goes. It's a funny notion, isn't it? But the Squire's just as mad on her as the Captain, and of course, if she wants a thing she must have it."

Mrs. Wilson shrugged her ample shoulders, thereby implying that she was not quite so desperately in love with the young widow as were the Squire and his son.

Poor Lesbia felt very much as if she had been suddenly checkmated.

What was the good of her bunch of keys? what was the good of her having come to the Croft at all if the bureau was to be taken out of her reach?

As she went back to her room scalding tears of helpless despair rose to her eyes, but before long they were chased away by her natural hopefulness.

Even yet she might bring her plans to a successful issue; but whatever she did must be done soon; once the bureau was taken out of the house her chances of exploring it would vanish.

She thought out the position until she fancied she had mastered it thoroughly; finally she resolved to make her attempt that same night after the dance was over.

It would be a risk to open the bureau in one room while Lady Vernon was asleep in the next, but there was no alternative, and she must accept the risk.

More than once she wished she had not embarked on this perilous enterprise, but having put her hand to the plough Lesbia was not the sort of girl to turn back.

The hours wore on; all day there was a bustle of servants running to and fro, a confusion of silvery laughter, and women's voices, and a general air of business about the place.

Later on the band arrived, and in the evening the house was brilliant with lights, and gay with the flowers that had been ruthlessly torn from the conservatories to deck the ball-room.

Then the guests began to drive up, and soon the strains of the band filled the air with the delicious sweetness of valse music, and Lesbia, sitting in her room in the dark—for Mrs. Chandos was downstairs receiving her visitors, and the young companion's presence had not been re-

quested—found her feet tapping the floor in measure to the rhythm.

How she would have liked to have been there! No girl in the world loved dancing more than she, but her opportunities for indulging her love had been limited.

She wondered if Lady Vernon looked very beautiful, and how many times she was dancing with Ronald, and her anxiety on these points at last became so overmastering that she slipped to the top of the stairs and peeped down into the hall below, where the dancing was in full swing.

Yes, they were valuing together now; she in a lustrous white satin gown, that made her look like a bride, and with strings of pearls round her throat and in her hair. Nor were pearls her only jewels, for below the single row clasping her neck was a magnificent necklet of diamonds that scintillated with starry rays as she moved.

A diamond crescent gleamed in the soft gold of her curls, and a couple more crescents amongst the laces of her corset, while bracelets of the same gems were fastened over her white *sauvé* gloves.

There were many pretty women there, but not one that could "hold a candle" to Lady Vernon, as Mr. Chandos more than once told his son.

Lesbia would have found it difficult to explain the icy chill that seemed to touch her heart as she watched the radiant little vision whirling round in Ronald's arms. She turned away with a half sick, half giddy feeling, almost as if she were going to faint.

A great longing for fresh air came over her—she wanted to feel the cool night wind on her brow, to see the calm, passionless, immutable stars above her, and gather some of their peace into her soul.

There was a second staircase leading down into the housekeeper's room, and by this she made her way into the garden, where she paced backwards and forwards listening to the music, and trying to reason herself into a less feverish frame of mind.

A fascination that she could not resist drew her once more nearer the dancers, and trusting to the night to hide her, she lingered on the terrace in front of the house, from whence she could obtain a perfect view through the open windows.

No one was likely to notice her, she told herself; they were all too much occupied with pleasure and with each other to spare a thought for the lonely girl watching them out of the darkness.

But this feeling of security was not quite justified: for presently a man walked out of the hall, stood for a moment looking round, and then, appearing to observe her, came rapidly towards her.

Lesbia was seized with a sudden terror, the reason of which she could hardly have explained. Instead of holding her ground bravely as she would have done under any other conditions she turned round and dashed into the shrubbery, trusting to her knowledge of the place to make her escape without being recognised; but she reckoned without her host this time, for fast as her footsteps were those of her pursuer were still faster, and just when she had reached the thicket of laurels, and was congratulating herself on having evaded him, she found herself clasped from behind by a pair of strong arms, and Ronald's voice exclaimed triumphantly,—

"So I have caught you! Now, please come into the light and let me see who you are."

It was useless for her to struggle in his grasp, all she could do was to exclaim, entreatingly,—

"It is I, Captain Chandos, please—please let me go!"

"Miss Talbot!" he exclaimed; but though there was an accent of astonishment in his voice it would have struck a listener as not being quite genuine, and although his clasp relaxed a little he still retained hold of her arm. "What brings you out here at this time of the evening?"

"I came—I came to look at the dancing," she faltered unsteadily.

"There is nothing surprising in that, nothing to be ashamed of certainly. Why, then, did you run away directly you were detected?"

"Why, indeed! This was what her own heart said to her.

"Unless," added Ronald, "you recognised me and were so very anxious to avoid me that you dared the darkness and loneliness of the shrubbery in preference to exchanging a word with me. Is this the case, Miss Talbot?"

She made no reply. As a matter of fact she had recognised him, and perhaps her flight was due to the recognition. He felt her tremble in his grasp.

"Am I so very repugnant to you?" he went on drawing nearer and bending his head so low that his breath fell hotly on her cheek. "Will no penitence soften you, no entreaties touch you to forgiveness? Ah, Lesbia, if I have sinned I have also suffered. Wont you believe me?"

Lesbia was absolutely powerless to answer him. She hated herself for her weakness, and yet, strive as she would she could neither overcome it nor prevent her heart from beating in great riotous throbs that threatened to choke her. Her blood was coursing through her veins with a swift vitality that would have been pain if it had not been such exquisite pleasure.

She was incapable of speech or movement, and even when his arms stole gently round her, and he drew her to his breast, she made no attempt at resistance.

"Darling, don't you understand that I love you, that I have loved you from the first moment I saw you, that I shall love you to the last hour of my life?" he whispered, passionately. "I have tried to overcome it, but it is too strong for me to fight against any longer. It seems to me such a passion as I have for you must compel a return by virtue of its own strength. Tell me, darling—darling!"

What answer Lesbia would finally have made it is impossible to say, but Ronald stopped suddenly and turned sharply round at the sound of a rustling in the bushes behind him.

Amidst the darkness of the shrubs something white and shining was visible, like the glimmer of satin.

"Go," he exclaimed hurriedly. "It is Lady Vernon. She must not see you here with me."

Lesbia obeyed, and he made his way back to the dancers, carefully avoiding the particular spot where the white satin had gleamed. But Lady Vernon was not to be baffled so easily, and hardly had he disappeared than she forced her way through the shrubs in the direction Lesbia had taken, and finally caught up the young girl, who was too agitated by the scene that had just occurred to recover her self-possession very quickly.

"Ah!" the fair widow exclaimed, laying her hand on Lesbia's arm and peering curiously into her face, "So it is you. I thought as much. I must confess you are somewhat daring to hold an assignation with Captain Chandos so near the house, especially while there are so many people about."

It is impossible to describe the insolence of her tone and manner, but it had an immediate effect on Lesbia, who drew herself away haughtily.

"I don't understand what you mean," she returned, and in spite of herself, her voice trembled.

Lady Vernon laughed mockingly.

"And yet it seems to me easy enough to understand. For my part I have no difficulty in probing the situation; but although I can hardly blame Captain Chandos for amusing himself by a flirtation, I don't think it's quite fair that he should carry it on with a member of his mother's household. I think I must give him a little lecture on the subject, and if you will take my advice you will have nothing more to do with him. Believe me, I am speaking with a view to your welfare, as you will confess if you will allow yourself time to remember that he is already engaged."

Saying which she fitted back to the house, leaving poor Lesbia to endure an agony of wounded pride, such as she had never experienced in her life before. Oh, how weak, how foolish she had been! She ought to have refused to listen to Ronald, she ought to have torn herself from his embrace, and most of all, she ought to have stifled that feeling in her own heart which had grown up without her knowledge until it had become too strong for her to uproot. For

she knew now that she loved him, that in spite of all her efforts her whole soul had gone out to him, and that parting from him would be like rending body and soul asunder.

And all the time he had been flirting with her, laughing at her, perhaps, and engaged to marry Lady Vernon!

Lesbia never knew afterwards how she found her way back, or how long she lay on her bed in the darkness, weeping dry, tearless sobs, that only quieted down as the night wore on. At last the music ceased, carriages drove away from the door, and a gradual silence told that the guests had departed, and all the household were in bed. Then Lesbia rose and looked at her watch. It was three o'clock, the dawn would soon be breaking, and if she intended searching the bureau she must lose no time about it. Her mind was made up. She could no longer remain at Thorncroft, where she would be sure to see Ronald every day, and where he might again insult her by his attentions; she would leave to-morrow, and oh, what a triumph it would be if she could carry the will away with her.

By this time she knew the different rooms of the house very well, and more than this, she had learned from Lady Vernon's maid that her ladyship was a heavy sleeper—a point very much in her favour. The dressing-room had two entrances, one from the corridor and one from the bedroom. Lesbia, of course, chose the former, and to her great relief she observed that the latter was closed. The dressing-room was littered over with various articles of attire that its owner had taken off; her satin gown was thrown across a couch, her tiny white slippers with their pearl embroidery lay on the floor, her fan was on the dressing-table, side by side with the flowers she had worn, and which had filled the air with their heavy exotic fragrance.

Lesbia noticed all these things in one swift glance before she knelt down in front of the bureau, opened it, and began fitting her keys in the little cupboard that was to disclose the secret drawer to her.

She was surprised at her own calmness; she went about her work as quietly and methodically as if she were engaged in some every day matter that she had been accustomed to all her life. Neither did she feel any special excitement as the prospect of finding the will—indeed, if it had not been for the thought of her sick mother she would have abandoned her quest altogether. She hardly yet realised the force of the blow that had been dealt her in the idea of Ronald's having made a plaything of her; all her faculties seemed numbed; by-and-by, when the reaction came, she would understand it better, and then the wound would throb and ache, and the nerves would bleed afresh.

The first key she tried opened the little cupboard, and a small aperture was revealed with drawers on either side. One by one she took these drawers out, feeling very carefully behind them for any clue to guide her to the secret recess, and so intent was she on her task that she did not notice a faint noise, like the click of a latch, from the adjoining room. But the bureau kept its secret well, not a sign could she discover of that which she sought, and at last she rose wearily, and half despairingly from her knees, confessing herself baffled. At the same moment the door leading to the bedroom was thrown wide open, and Lady Vernon, wrapped in a white cashmere dressing gown, and with her golden hair in a tangled mass of curls over her shoulders, stood on the threshold.

Lesbia felt the blood run cold in her veins. She remained standing in front of the open bureau as if she had been turned to stone, and to complete her dismay, Lady Vernon haughtily crossed the dressing-room opened the door leading to the corridor, and beckoned forward no less a person than Mr. Chandos.

"What's the meaning of this I should like to know!" he exclaimed, after a moment's pause, and he advanced and shook the girl roughly by the arm. "Come, Miss Talbot, explain what brings you here at this time of the night, or rather of the morning, tampering with the property of my visitors."

His tone was so threatening, his manner so

abrupt, that Lesbia shrank back in greater consternation than before. No excuse occurred to her, and she dared not tell the real object of her nocturnal visit. Her self-possession deserted her completely, she was silent, but she held her two hands before her face in the attitude of one who wards off a blow, while every vestige of colour ebbed from her cheeks.

Under ordinary circumstances she was as brave and quick-witted a girl as one might wish to meet; but it must be remembered that her fortune had been very severely tried during the past few hours. Her nerves were thoroughly upset, and could not meet the sudden strain put upon them.

"What, you have nothing to say for yourself?" went on the Squire, with blustering anger. "We have taken you at a bit of a disadvantage. I suppose you didn't bargain for being caught in the very act of rifling the bureau—and with false keys too!" he added, taking hold of the bunch Jean had sent. "By Jove, you are a nice sort of person to have in a respectable house,—the head of a gang of professional London thieves, I'll take even money. The only wonder is that you weren't too clever to save yourself from being found out."

A little cry from Lady Vernon interrupted this tirade, and turned his attention to her.

"My jewels! They are gone."

"Gone!" repeated the Squire, while she wrung her hands in frantic distress. "Your diamonds gone?"

This was a very serious matter to Mr. Chandos. The jewels were worth a considerable sum, and he already regarded them as heirlooms in the Chandos family.

Lady Vernon turned to Lesbia.

"Miss Talbot, I implore you to restore my diamonds to me while there is yet time. If you will do so I promise no action shall be taken against you. Surely you will see the wisdom of doing what I ask."

Lesbia stared at her, almost in stupefaction.

"Do you accuse me—me—of taking your jewels?" she said at last incredulously, and as if she half-doubted the evidence of her own senses.

"What other alternative have I? When I took them off after the dance I put them in the bureau, and locked them up for safety. A few hours later I find them gone, and in the meantime you have opened the bureau with a false key. What can I believe except that you have stolen them?"

"Of course she has stolen them—or tried to steal them," put in the Squire, angrily. "But, as to letting her off from the consequences of her crime I shall have a word to say in that matter. I am a magistrate, and it would never do to let it be said that I compounded a felony in my own house. I shall immediately sign a warrant for this young woman's arrest, and perhaps when she finds herself within the walls of a jail she may come to the conclusion that she has not hoodwinked us all so completely as she reckoned on doing."

CHAPTER VI.

THAT same afternoon Lesbia did indeed find herself within the "four walls" of which the Squire had spoken so grudgingly, lodged there on the charge of having stolen Lady Vernon's diamonds.

Beyond protesting her innocence, she had said very little, and now her one consolation was that in coming to Thorncroft she had assumed a false name, and by this means saved her family from the disgrace that would otherwise have fallen upon it.

There was no danger of any clue being discovered in her trunk, for she had been very careful to destroy the few letters she had received from her sister and Jean, and beyond these two she possessed no correspondents.

Brave as she was she could not but see that her position was by no means an enviable one.

What had become of Lady Vernon's jewels she did not know, but there was the undoubted fact that she—Lesbia—had been discovered in her

ladyship's dressing room, and that she had forced open the bureau in which their owner declared she had placed the diamonds with a false key.

Moreover she had neither excuse nor explanation to offer of her presence there at such an hour and under such circumstances.

Her one hope was that the jewels might be found, but the hope was a slender one, and it grew slenderer with every hour that passed.

It was a terrible humiliation for proud Lesbia to know herself a prisoner, charged with theft.

At first she almost failed to realise it, but as the day wore on, and the silence and solitude of her cell remained unbroken, a fuller comprehension of it forced itself upon her, and towards evening a feeling that was almost despair took possession of her.

Was her whole future life to be branded with the shame of an unfounded accusation—would the jury convict her? and would she be sentenced to a long imprisonment for a crime that she had never committed?

Alas! for all her dreams of taking her sick mother away to sunny foreign climes, where health might come back to her; such visions seemed farther off than ever, for now her last chance of searching the bureau had gone, and she fancied she knew enough of Mr. Chandos and Lady Vernon to feel sure that in case either discovered the will, it would never be permitted to be made public.

Once the thought struck her of boldly avowing who she was, and her motive for coming to the Croft, but she dismissed it immediately.

In the first place it would not be believed, and secondly such an avowal would bring about the publication of her real name, and then the knowledge of her position could hardly fail to reach her mother, upon whom, in her present state of health, it might have a fatal effect.

No, she had undertaken her quest without her mother's knowledge, and against her sister's advice.

Since it had turned out disastrously she had no one but herself to blame, and she must bear the brunt of the consequences, let them be what they may.

She had just arrived at this conclusion when a rattling of keys outside warned her that someone was coming in, and a little later there entered Captain Chandos.

His face was very pale, and there was an expression in his eyes that reminded her of the moment when he had stopped the runaway horse on the day of her arrival at the Croft.

At first he did not speak. They stood facing each other, she leaning against the wall of the cell, her hands clasped tightly together in front of her, her eyes downcast; he looking at her with a steady gaze that seemed as if it would read her very soul.

Then, as though actuated by an uncontrollable impulse, he took her hands, and in spite of her efforts to disengage them, held them firmly in his.

"Lesbia!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe you are guilty of this crime with which they charge you. There is a hideous mistake somewhere, and it shall be my duty to discover it. But you must be open with me, you must tell me frankly the motive that took you to Lady Vernon's room while she was supposed to be asleep."

The girl's lips quivered, a sudden rush of crimson flooded her cheeks.

"Has not Lady Vernon herself told you that already?" she demanded, rebelliously.

"She has given me her version of the matter, but I want to hear yours."

"What chance will my word have against that of your promised wife?"

"She is not my promised wife. She might have been if I had never met you, and if I had never known what love really was, but now it is impossible."

He was looking straight into her eyes as he said this, and he saw the glad light that leapt into them, and of which she herself was unaware.

"Is this true?" she murmured, almost in a whisper.

"It is absolutely true."

"But she said, she intimated that you were engaged to her."

"Then she was either telling an egregious falsehood, or she was the victim of a grave error. As I said before, I might have married her if I had not met you. My father wished the match, and I liked her well enough. But I did not love her, I never have loved her, and lately I have paid her attention with the stupid idea of seeing if I couldn't make you jealous. Won't you believe me, Lesbia?"

He bent down a little as he asked the question, and he felt the thrill that quivered through the girl's frame.

"Yes," she whispered, "I do believe you."

A delicious blush mantled her cheek, the velvet shadow of her lashes drooped over her eyes.

She dared not return his glance lest he should guess the secret that she would hardly confess to her own soul.

"And, believing me, will you not treat me at least as a friend, and tell me the meaning of this mystery? Understand, I refuse to believe you are a thief; nothing but your own confession shall induce me to believe it."

"You only do me justice," she said, slowly, "I am as innocent of taking Lady Vernon's diamonds as you are yourself."

"Then what made you open the bureau?"

She was silent.

Should she tell him everything—confess that her real object had been one, which, if successful, would take from him his heritage?

"Did Lady Vernon tell you she saw me open the bureau?" she asked, more for the purpose of gaining time for thought than for anything else.

"She did. Her account is that she could not sleep, and hearing a slight noise in the dressing-room, she peeped through the keyhole, and saw you in the act. Then she went and called my father, who corroborated her story. Besides, I myself saw you at the bureau one Sunday when it was in the study, and it struck me then that for some reason or other you wished to investigate its contents."

"And yet you believe me innocent?"

"I do, with all my heart and soul, and I will try my best to prove it before all the world. Ah, Lesbia!" his voice softened, and he drew her closer, "you have taught me what a mighty power love is; until I met you I thought it was only a theme for poets and schoolgirls. Now I know better, you were so proud too, you held me at such a distance that I was afraid you hated me until last night, when you let me kiss you, and then I knew you cared for me, and that it was your pride that would not allow you to unbend. Dearest, to show you how complete is my faith, I ask you now to promise to marry me, and then, whatever happens, I shall at least have the right to protect you."

How handsome, how manly he looked as he uttered this chivalrous speech!

It broke down the last barrier between them, and Lesbia, her head resting on his shoulder, burst into a passion of tears.

But this weakness did not last long. Presently she raised her head, and drew a little way from him.

"You are more generous to me than I deserve. It is quite true that as long as I could, I stole my heart against you, for I came to Thorncroft looking upon you as my enemy, and determined to treat you as such."

"Your enemy!" he repeated, in amazement, "why you had never seen me, you knew nothing whatever about me."

"Wait a minute, and you shall hear the whole story, and when you have heard, you shall pronounce your judgment on me," she said, controlling herself by a great effort, and then, clearly and concisely, she gave him full details of her purpose in coming to the Croft, of her search for the will, and her non-success.

As she finished, her voice quivered, and she looked at him anxiously.

Would he believe her, and—more important still—would he forgive her?

That he was agitated by her narrative was quite clear.

His brows knitted themselves together in the frown habitual to him when he was puzzled or put out, and he did not immediately make any comment.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" she said, at last, unable to bear the suspense any longer. "Do you think I did wrong in coming to the Croft under false pretences? Remember it was for the sake of my mother, who is dying—yes, dying, for lack of the comforts that we cannot afford to give her."

"No," he said, at length. "I do not think you were wrong in view of your motive, but I was thinking that my father was wrong in taking the estates without attempting to make any provision for your family. Although they may be his legally, he has no moral claim on them. As to the will, I myself will take the matter in hand, and the bureau shall be examined thoroughly. We will find the secret recess even if the thing has to be broken to pieces to get at it. Meanwhile there is the matter of your imprisonment to consider. What you have told me explains why you went to the dressing-room, but it does not explain what has become of the diamonds."

Lesbia shook her head despondingly.

"I cannot explain it, but I know this—that the bureau was locked when I opened it, and there was no sign of the diamonds inside, although Lady Vernon declared she had put them there such a short while ago."

"The question is then, who had been in the room between her retiring to rest, and your entrance?"

"No one but her maid could possibly have been there I should imagine, certainly no one from the outside, because so little time elapsed."

"Her maid!" repeated Ronald, thoughtfully. "I must make inquiries about her; in point of fact, I will at once place the affair in the hands of the police. It is terrible to think of your being here under such an accusation."

A slow wave of colour mounted to the girl's cheek; then she said, in a voice too low for any but a lover to hear,—

"I don't think I mind much so long as you believe me innocent."

He clasped her to him in a rapture of delight.

"Ah, Lesbia, it is sweet to hear you say that; it is the first confession of caring for me that has fallen from your lips. But I am not content with even so much. I want to hear in so many words that you love me."

"I love you, I love you!" she cried passionately. "I love you as I never thought it was in my nature to love anyone, I love you in spite of myself, but,"—and she drew herself resolutely from him—"I will never marry you unless I can come to you with an unstained name and with the consent of your family, for I could not bear the thought that you made a sacrifice for me. This is my final decision, and nothing will make me waver from it."

(Continued on page 141.)

THERE are many curious parallel passages which show that Shakespeare was thoroughly familiar with the Scriptures and drew from them many of his ideas. Shakespeare: "Rude am I in my speech" (*Othello*, act i. sc. 3); Bible: "Though I be rude in speech" (2 Cor. xi. 6). Shakespeare: "Show his eyes and grieve his heart" (*Macbeth*, act iv. sc. 1); Bible: "To consume thine eyes and to grieve thine heart" (1 Sam. ii. 33). Shakespeare: "Life's but a walking shadow" (*Macbeth*, act v. sc. 5); Bible: "Man walketh in a vain shadow" (Ps. xxxix. 6). Shakespeare: "We'll die with harness on our backs" (*Macbeth*, act v. sc. 5); Bible: "Nimrod lay dead in his harness" (2 Mac. xv. 28). Shakespeare: "Woe to that land that's governed by a child" (*Richard III.*, act ii. sc. 3); Bible: "Woe to thee, oh land, when thy king is a child" (Ecc. x. 16). Many similar parallel passages are to be found.

TWO GIRLS.

—30—

CHAPTER XXI.

OWEN TUDOR knew it would not do to excite comment in the house, so he took Mr. Dickinson into breakfast and introduced him to Ethel and Arline as a gentleman devoted to archaeology, who, being in the neighbourhood, had turned aside to examine their quaint old church and picturesque home. Hawkins, who was in attendance, may have had his doubts, but the girls "took in" their brother's story readily.

"What are you going to do this morning?" asked Owen, kindly.

"We were going to Chilton Hall to see the preparations for the ball, and show Doris to Mrs. Anstruther," said Ethel; "but I suppose, after last night, you would rather we stayed at home, Owen?"

He shook his head.

"My dear, I have changed my mind. I am sure now it will be impossible to keep our loss from the world. You are quite at liberty to mention it to the Anstruthers. I shall be very much engaged with Mr. Dickinson, so I shall miss you. There is only one part of your programme I want to alter, I can't spare Doris."

"Oh!" in an aggrieved tone, "and you had her all to yourself for hours last night!"

He smiled at the accusation.

"Well, child, I'll meet you half-way. If you go over to the Hall, they are sure to keep you to lunch. I'll drive Doris over in the afternoon and fetch you home."

They were nice warm-hearted, affectionate girls, and Owen loved them dearly; but yet it was a great relief to him to feel they were disposed of for the day. He and Doris proposed to take Mr. Dickinson to see the church later. Meanwhile they invited him to the library, whose old oak carving was well worth inspection. The supposed archaeologist took the chair offered him in a dreamy, abstracted way, sure sign that something had perplexed him.

"Those young ladies know nothing?" he remarked.

"They know that the diamonds are missing, and we suspect the same hand took them that stripped the morning-room, but they do not know the terrible doubts in our heart," said Owen, gravely. "Mr. Dickinson, before I go on further let us understand each other. I want to unearth this man and to unravel the strange mystery which hangs over his proceedings; but I can only work with you on one condition. If he turns out to be a—a family connection of mine I don't want to prosecute him, does consulting with you mean I bind myself to charge him with this robbery?"

"As the owner of the missing property that rests with you," said the detective, gravely; "but I must remind you the man is 'wanted' now on a far graver charge. If that poor girl in Bloomsbury dies he is her murderer."

Owen groaned.

"I had forgotten that."

"I can't for the life of me discover why you should fancy the man is a connection of yours," said John Dickinson, "but in any case he is sure to be run to ground soon. If we work together you will probably regain some of the missing property, and his connexion with your family, (if any) may be kept out of court."

"Doris," Owen looked at her appealingly, "what are we to do?"

"I should tell Mr. Dickinson everything," she answered promptly, "so long as it was only robbery, I feared our suspicion was right, but now I can't believe he would attempt murder."

"You may trust me," said Dickinson gravely, "to keep your secrets. I never betrayed a confidence yet."

So Owen told him all. He began with his own return from dining at the Anstruthers to find the library window open, and his mother creeping home like a silent ghost. He told of Hawkins' account of the strange visitor, the "friend of the family," of the porter's testimony to the black bag carried by the solitary passenger

for the parliamentary train on the Wednesday morning. Of the old gentleman who had called on Doris the following afternoon, and finally of the tramp seen by Charles Peyton and Mr. Croft about a fortnight earlier.

Mr. Dickinson followed every word with quiet rapt interest. When Owen paused, he said, slowly,—

"Now, let me tell my story. Earlier in the day this tramp was seen loafing about near your old home, Mr. Tudor. He called at Messrs. Paternoster and Hall's office, and asked if they had a clerk called Owen Tudor. The manager seems not to have liked the look of him. He describes him as a shabby, genteel, broken down gentleman, and thinking he was a poor relation going to call on you, instead of giving him your address, he told him curtly you had left and had never applied to them for references. Tracing the man's movements back that same day it seems he came from Southampton. He landed there the night before with a few pounds in his pocket, lost most of his money at billiards and reached London nearly penniless. Getting the sight of a post-office directory he scribbled two addresses on his cuff. It seems tolerably clear that these were Messrs. Paternoster and Hall's office, and Mrs. Montague's house at Camberwell. It's equally clear that his one object was to see either that lady or yourself."

Owen looked cast down.

"And yet you think he can be no connection of mine?"

"Only because; excuse me. It appears to me, sir, you have no connections whom he could be. It looks to me as though he knew some secret about your family he was anxious to sell at a heavy price. Making inquiries he perhaps found you were not a likely subject for intimidation, and so thought he would carry off a few valuables for himself. Then, Mr. Tudor the case lies in a nutshell and things dovetail into each other beautifully, if it weren't for the job of Wednesday night, I confess that baffles me. What connection this man could have with Gladys Keith I can't make out, but for its being your dagger that did the deed I should feel inclined to think there were two men answering to one description, and that the two cases were completely separate."

Owen took a crumpled paper from his breast pocket and handed it to the detective; it was the one wrapped round the signet-ring.

Mr. Dickinson read it in silence.

"And this aroused your fears of Herbert (we must use some name in speaking of him), being a relation."

"I thought he was my uncle, Henry Tudor, who, if alive, would have a superior claim to Diamond End. It seemed to me if under a cloud so that he dared not return to England, openly under his own name, he would think himself justified in taking anything he could lay hands on here, because he would regard the whole property as his own."

"Granted," said Dickinson slowly, "only there is no crime except murder that would not be wellnigh forgotten in seventeen years, and he would have no object in hiding himself from you."

"My sister has another theory," answered Owen. "Doris, my dear, speak."

"I think he is my father, Herbert Montague. I mean I *did* think so till I heard of the attack on Gladys Keith; but oh, I can't believe he would do that."

"What made you think of it, Miss Montague?"

"It seemed to me when I saw him on Thursday, there was something strangely familiar in his voice; it was as though a long forgotten memory of my childhood had come back to me."

Owen came to his sister's help and told Mr. Dickinson of their mother's strange silence respecting the cause of her husband's death; of her peculiarly reserved secretive disposition; of her increasing desire for money, although as far as they could make out she spent very little on herself.

The detective listened with shrewd attention; yet when Mr. Tudor stopped he asked a question which seemed to his two listeners singularly irrele-

vant. "Can you tell me anything of Maurice Douglas, whom I believe is the only surgeon in this neighbourhood?"

"What sort of thing?" repeated Owen, in a puzzled tone. "I don't like the fellow, nobody about here does. It is well known that he was tacitly, if not openly engaged to Gladys Keith, and that he broke off the engagement as soon as he discovered she was not an heiress. I believe he is clever in his profession; but, personally, I detest him."

"Yet he has been here a great deal," put in the detective saucily, "and I have heard he possesses more of Mrs. Montague's confidence than her own children."

Doris started. Was this man a magician? if not how did he possibly come to know this?

Owen felt as bewildered as his sister.

"I cannot deny it," he admitted; "but I have never fathomed the reason for my mother's extraordinary infatuation."

"Mrs. Montague is still in the prime of life," suggested Dickinson, "and I am told a lady of unusual attractions."

"She must be twenty years older than Douglas," replied her son, "and she has not money enough to make him anxious to marry her."

"Well, I confess, Mr. Tudor, I believe Mrs. Montague and Maurice Douglas are the only persons who can throw light on this mystery. I have it on good authority that the surgeon had a visitor staying with him for about ten days, whom not even his own servant was allowed to see. Mr. Douglas waited on his guest himself, telling his old housekeeper the gentleman was a patient of weak intellect of whom he had undertaken the temporary care. He added that Mr. Herbert (notice the name, please) was apt to become dangerous if irritated, and that he hated the sight of strangers. Needless to say, after this the housekeeper never made any attempt to see him."

Owen looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"I can't see my way," he said sadly. "If I go to this Douglas and try to extract a confession from him I should fail, the man hates me bitterly, I suppose because he once expected to be—in a sense—master here himself, he would positively delight in outwitting me."

"I believe he would. Mr. Tudor, shall I give you my advice? I don't expect it will be very particularly palatable, but it is sincere."

"I shall be grateful to you."

"Take no notice whatever to Mrs. Montague or Mr. Douglas of recent events, but go to London yourself to-day, before you start take the whole collection of jewels, in fact, every portable valuable you can lay hold of to the bank."

"But what am I to do in London?" asked Owen, not comprehending in the least.

"Your great object in going there is to put people off the scent. While you are here neither Mrs. Montague nor Maurice Douglas will make a single move. They dare not while your eyes are on them. With you gone they will be free to act."

"But you!" breathed Doris, quickly. "Surely your true character will be discovered, Mr. Dickinson! How could my brother leave a guest alone?"

"My dear young lady," said the detective, quietly, "I can take care of myself. I propose that Mr. Tudor gives out that in view of the recent robberies he shall lock up the library which is the repository of his important papers. During his absence I shall encamp there. Your faithful butler will perhaps bring me supplies of food. I can go in and out at the French windows without exciting suspicion. Mr. Douglas can't be in two places at once, when I am sure he is here I can invade his own house and cross-question his old housekeeper, also my ears are unusually good, and, with Hawkins' assistance, I will guarantee to listen to the first interview between your mother and her confidential adviser."

"Hawkins is true as steel," said Owen, "and he personally dislikes Douglas; but I hate seeming to spy upon my mother."

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"I rather fancy, sir, if my suspicions are right, Mrs. Montague will be grateful to you in the end. I believe she is not so entirely fascinated by the

doctor as you imagine, but is by some means in his power. Would you tell me how much money your mother has had from you lately?"

Owen looked at Doris uncomfortably. He had disregarded her warning, and though allowing his mother no power over the housekeeping expenditure, he had given her what together amounted to a good substantial sum.

"Just so," said the detective quietly, "and most of this money was in cheques?"

"How can you know?"

"I have ascertained that Mr. Douglas recently paid away cheques for thirty, twenty and fifteen pounds signed by yourself and drawn to the order of Mrs. Montague. It is hardly likely that in less than two months such sums should have been due for medical attendance."

Owen groaned.

"Say no more," he answered, sadly. "I put myself in your hands. I will go to the bank and thence to London, only I hope my exile will not be a long one. I am engaged to some friends for Monday evening, and I should not like to leave my sisters alone for Christmas."

"I don't think you must return on Monday, that would hardly give time enough. You can come home on Christmas Eve."

"You must go to Ashley," put in Doris, "then you can travel down together on Tuesday. By-the-by, Owen, did you get a letter from him?"

"Yes; a long one came this morning. I have hardly had time to read it yet."

"Trust me, sir," said the detective, "three nights out of this place will do you all the good in the world. You look well-nigh fagged out, and I'm afraid there's more trouble in store for you before you are done with this affair."

"He was up all night," said Doris to the detective, as Owen left them to give the needful instructions to Hawkins, and pack a small valise, "and I expect he has hardly slept at all peacefully since Tuesday."

Mr. Dickinson nodded.

"He doesn't look built to stand much worry, miss," he said, civilly, "and there's no doubt this is an unpleasant business. You'll please to remember, Miss Montague, my best help and advice are at your disposal during your brother's absence, the butler will have the key of the library, and if you need my aid you have only to ask him for it."

Owen came back very soon.

"I fear the girls will be disappointed," he said to Doris, "but I can't expect you to go over to the Anstruthers by yourself."

"No; I will send a little note over by one of the servants to explain. Owen," looking full into his face, "shall you call at Tregarthen Mansions to inquire for Miss Nairn?"

"I meant to," he said gravely. "I must tell her how much I regret my property should have been used to injure her sister."

CHAPTER XXII.

MISS PRIMROSE did not fail May's trust in her; the kind old lady had dismissed her pupils for the vacation, and was alone at Cambria House when her favourite's letter came. Her action was very prompt, she quietly bade one of the maids pack a portmanteau, and leaving an elderly governess who, having no home, was always free to stay for the holidays, in charge of the house, she caught an early train and reached the flat almost before May had begun to expect a reply to her letter.

Mrs. Barton, who was with May when the old lady arrived, "took to" her at once, and speedily offered the use of her own spare room.

"My sister has just disappointed us, and it is all ready. I shall be so pleased to take you in; I know you will want to spend all day with these girls, but it will be much better for you to come to us than go to an hotel or lodging, and you will feel nearer them."

She left very soon after, and, as Gladys was sleeping peacefully, May indulged in a long chat with her kind old friend; it was a comfort to pour out her heart to the only mother she had

ever known, and to assure her that the five hundred and twenty pounds no longer seemed an impossible fortune.

"If I go on as I have begun I shall have paid off every penny by the time I am twenty-five," she said triumphantly; "and when I send my hateful stepfather the money I shall enjoy telling him what I think of him."

"Of course I returned the last draft," said Miss Primrose, "and then I had a letter from your mother. Poor soul, she must have written it unknown to her husband, and waited long for a chance of posting it, for it arrived weeks after date. She begged I would try and watch over you, and that I would tell you she had always loved you though she had been weak enough to give you up."

May shook her head.

"I don't think I can ever forgive her. And now, dear, I want you to tell me what you think of the awful accident here!" And she told Miss Primrose the whole story, not forgetting to show her the letter endorsed with the strange warning to forget her father's very name and to avoid his relations; she had an attentive listener but Miss Primrose gave her little comfort.

"I think, dear, forgive me, there was some disreputable secret in your father's life. The last time I ever saw your mother she was very near confiding in me, only something held her back; again and again she seemed on the brink of a confidence and then stopped."

"She must have said something," urged May, "to give you that impression."

"I will tell you; I asked her if Mr. Nairn's relations sought you out what I was to do; would she like me to encourage the intimacy or not? She said with a strange bitterness that the Nairns would have nothing to do with your father's child; I could not help thinking then he had done something more disgraceful than simply being poor. Then, too, Mr. Page's refusal to let you form part of his family, his stern resolution to part you from your mother before he married her, it all seemed to tell me there was a shadow on your name."

May's eyes were wet with tears.

"That poor child in there," and she glanced towards the room where Gladys lay, "thinks herself to be pitied, she has lost home, adopted parents, lover, wealth and yet I could almost envy her, at least her past is fair and clear as an open book; there is no worse crime than poverty laid to her charge, while I—I think I can never look the world bravely in the face again until I know the worst."

Miss Primrose tried in vain to soothe her. May's courage seemed daunted; not even a most affable letter from her employers expressing full satisfaction with her work at Chilton Hall could restore her spirits, though she was relieved her presence was not required at the Emporium till the second day of January, the proprietors inferring justly people were too busy with other things from Christmas to New Year, to trouble about artistic furniture.

"Thursday week," breathed May, "almost a fortnight, Gladys must be better by then."

"She is very pretty," said Miss Primrose, kindly; "and what a wonderful attachment there seems to be between you."

"We were just alike," said May, simply; "two lonely girls with their way to make and their bread to earn, it is no wonder we felt drawn to each other; and, oddly enough, Gladys is not unlike me, it was the chance resemblance between us made me first think of calling her my sister."

"This is a pretty little place," and Miss Primrose gazed approvingly round the flat; "but, oh, dear, to my idea, there is something dreadful in two girls living alone."

"We can't afford to study Mrs. Grundy," said May, "and we have been very happy here."

Gladys was so much better the next day that Dr. Gill declared she was out of danger, and that with good nursing and great care he did think she would pull through. This sent May into brilliant spirits, and seeing her darling so bright and happy kind Miss Primrose had no compunction in leaving her for an hour or two while she visited an invalid teacher who had gone home to a dreary little house near Victoria-station to see

what a quarter's rest would do towards restoring her.

Miss Primrose started at three and declared she should be back by five. It was about that time when there came a knock at the door, and May opened it quickly, expecting to see her kind old friend; but it was the man who had brought her home that foggy November morning, her own knight as May called him, whom she found on the threshold.

"Mr. Tudor, is it possible?"

Owen smiled half sadly.

"I was obliged to come to London for a day or two, and I could not resist calling to inquire after your sister. I assure you when I heard of your trouble I felt horrified that my dangerous property should have been used to injure her."

"You are very kind," then in proof of her recent speech to Miss Primrose that she could not afford to study Mrs. Grundy, she added, "Will you not come in?"

They sat down opposite each other in the pretty sitting-room, and by the soft lamplight they could see clearly the havoc three days had made. May was pale from watchful nights and deep anxiety, but Owen's face was actually haggard.

"It must have been a terrible home coming for you," he said, gently. "Miss Nairn, I can't fence with you. I am not good at dissembling, a London detective declares that your 'sister' is really Gladys Keith, my uncle's adopted child; if it be so I want you to persuade her to accept not Diamond End itself, but such a provision as will keep her in comfort all her days. I have not spoken to anyone on the subject. I don't know the resources of the estate, but from the funded property I think twenty or thirty thousand pounds could be advanced with very little delay, and the interest of that would produce a moderate income."

"It is just like you," and May's eyes flashed him a grateful glance. "I promised Gladys I would never betray her secret; but now you have guessed it I may as well admit the truth. I am certain she would never accept such a sum as you suggest; but I think if you would give her enough to bring in two or three hundred a-year, she would be grateful. I don't think," with a strange smile, "my pretty Gladys will need such help long."

Owen started.

"You can't mean she is dying. You said she was better!"

"So I did. The doctor said to-day she was out of danger. I mean I think she will marry young."

"In spite of—Maurice Douglas?"

Miss Nairn shrugged her shoulders.

"If you have heard as much Northshire gossip as fell to my share in three days, you will know that there was—someone else."

"Marnaduke Blake, who went abroad to try and forget her?"

"Well, people don't always succeed in forgetting, and I fancy if Mr. Blake came back he would have a very different answer. I think Mr. Douglas killed her love when he let Gladys see him in his true colours, and, I must not betray too much, but when we thought she was dying, the only name on her lips was 'Duke,' the only prayer she uttered, an entreaty that he would come back to her."

"She is very pretty."

"Very," not quite understanding the remark, but heartily endorsing it. "So pretty one can't understand a man deserting her because she was poor."

"There are worse drawbacks than poverty," said Owen, sadly. "Miss Nairn, do you think love could bridge over them? Do you think a man on whose family a terrible shadow may fall, is justified in speaking of love?"

"I believe in love," said May, dreamily, a world of feeling in her beautiful eyes. "I think no fear of coming trouble should separate two people who really care for each other."

"But I said disgrace," he answered.

"No disgrace, then," her voice faltered, "unless you mean the stigma of insanity. Anyone who has the slightest suspicion of the curse that is in his blood should give up all thought of love."

"Miss Nairn, May," cried Owen impetuously, "you have given me courage. I have loved you ever since that foggy day last November. If we were situated as others are, if I had the opportunity of seeing you often I would not have spoken so hurriedly. I would have waited and tried to teach you to love me; but it may be months before we meet again. I can't keep silence, my whole heart is yours, can you give me any hope?"

May conquered her trembling voice by an effort.

"It would be your ruin," she answered. "You are the owner of Diamond End, I am a 'shop girl,' in the eyes of connoisseurs. Why, half Northshire would out you dead."

"I don't care," he said with a smile, "but," growing very grave again, "I ought to explain to you the shadow threatening not my name but that of those dearest to me. You have heard of the robbery at Diamond End! You know the police believe it to have been committed by the very man who injured Gladys—"

"Yes."

He looked full into her eyes.

"There is grave reason to fear that man—is my stepfather, Herbert Montague. May, if Gladys had been your sister really, I should not have dared to speak, but now I venture to tell you of my love, though it is right, you should know there are chances my mother's husband may yet stand in the felon's dock."

She looked at him pitifully. She did more, she rose and crossed to his side, putting her slender fingers on his arm.

"It is not your sin," she said solemnly, "and o—h, your poor mother! What must she not be suffering, does she know?"

"We have told her nothing; it is all conjecture at present. For so many years I have thought of Montague as dead, I can hardly realise he is alive."

"Why should he seek to injure Gladys?"

"I cannot say; a thick cloud of mystery hangs over everything. Only, May, my darling, I love you so much if you will give me your promise I shall have courage to bear up against all. If you can give me hope, do not think you will be injuring Gladys Keith by becoming my wife, I cannot restore her Diamond End, dearest—the lawyers tell me—for, until actual proof of my Uncle Henry's death is found, I am only tenant-at-will; but in any case one half of the personality of the late Squire must be mine, and it is ample to allow me to provide for Gladys and yet make an careful home for my wife."

"But you know nothing about me," objected May.

"I know that you are the one woman in the world I can love. I am not afraid of any wonderful objections you can raise, May, if you will once admit you care for me a little."

"I'm afraid I do," said the girl rather ruefully, "but I assure you I never meant to. I couldn't help caring, you were so different from anyone else. Gladys used to call you my knight, but for all that it is impossible that I can marry you."

"But why?" he urged. "You say you are willing to risk the disgrace that may, nay, which must, fall on us if Mr. Montague is alive."

"I am not thinking of him."

"Of what then?"

She blushed crimson.

"More than a year ago I discovered that I owed my education, my maintenance, in fact, to charity. I hated my unknown benefactor, and I resolved never to rest until I had repaid him. I am pledged by the most solemn vow never to leave off my life of work until he has received the uttermost farthing. I was telling my dear old schoolmistress to-day I should manage it before I was twenty-five."

"May! what an idea," and Owen smiled; "tell me the amount of the bond and we will wipe it off together at one blow."

"It is five hundred and twenty pounds, but I have saved a great deal; but I couldn't let you pay it. Fancy beginning an engagement by calling on you to pay my debts!"

Owen smiled.

"If you won't take it any other way, May, it shall be deducted from the sum I should settle

on my bride. Now, my darling, don't you think you might give in?"

She hesitated.

"It would be taking all from you," she whispered, "and I should bring you nothing. I have not a relation in England, and when my mother married her present husband he made it a stipulation she should give me up. For fourteen long years she has never sent me a single line, not even a message with the cheques her husband forwarded for my education."

"Then he is the man you are so anxious to repay?"

"Yes! Don't you see he robbed me of my mother and then flung his gold at me by way of make up."

"Leave me to settle with him, May. Dear, there have been many sorrows in my life. I think, little girl, I know more about poverty and hardships than you do, but I would give up Diamond End and every penny of the Tudor property, I would go back to being a city clerk at a hundred and fifty pounds a year gladly if no other way would give me you."

"There's something else," said the girl slowly.

"Miss Primrose, my kind old teacher, thinks that my own father must have done something dishonourable. She says Mr. Page couldn't have made such cruel conditions about my mother's giving me up unless it was so."

"If you will risk the chance of Herbert Montague being alive, and the cruel assault of Gladys, I think I may take the remotest chance of your father having done something wrong. My darling, death blots out sin, and makes people's judgment very tender, and it is you I want, not your ancestors."

Her tears were falling thick and fast.

"I had so built my hopes on my father being someone good and great," she whispered. "I had meant when this money was paid to go abroad and trace out the people who knew him. I used to think that I would devote my life just to clearing his name, but after what Miss Primrose has told me I feel I had better let things rest and not try to find out more lest I bring an awful discovery on myself."

Owen stroked the girl's soft hair caressingly.

"I think you are wise, my darling."

"Have you ever heard anything about my father? Oh, Owen," as his face changed, "tell me!"

"My dear, I cannot, I know nothing."

"But you have heard something. Oh tell me or I shall think it worse than it is."

"It was only," he hesitated, "when Arline spoke of meeting you at the Anstruthers, my mother said she knew a Mr. Nairn once, who was not a desirable acquaintance."

"Mrs. Montague will be very angry when you tell her about me."

"In any case I had meant to arrange a separate home for her soon. Arline is to be married in February, and Doris in June, it would be very dull for Ethel at Diamond End without either of her sisters so I thought of taking a little house for her and mother somewhere near Doris; then if I had not contrived to melt your hard heart, May, I should have shut up Diamond End and gone abroad."

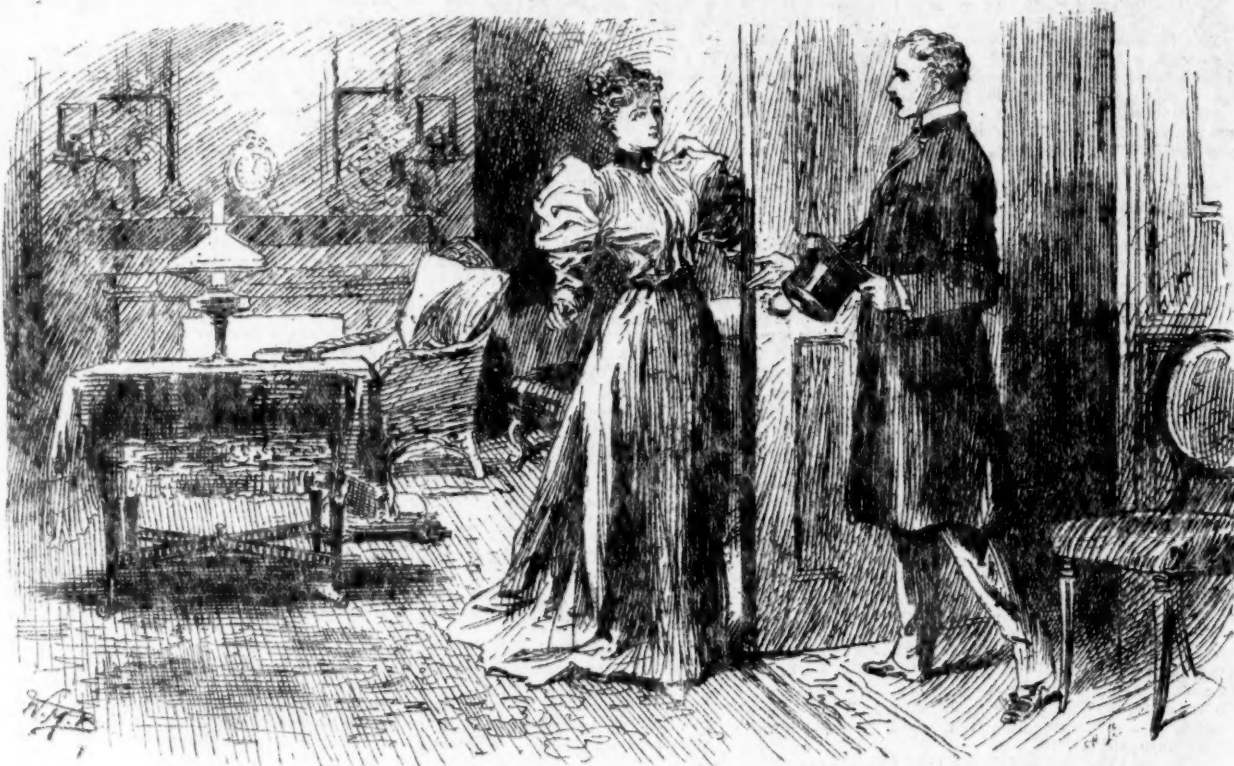
"I don't think I was half hard-hearted enough," said May, "Oh!" as a bell sounded, "there is Miss Primrose."

She brought the old lady into the sitting-room just as a faint call came from Gladys, so with an entreating "Please tell her," to Owen, May sped away to the invalid.

Miss Primrose did not approve of girls living alone, but it was a far greater enormity when, under such circumstances, they were visited by young men, and she looked at Mr. Tudor with as much severity as she could muster, which was not very much after all, and was, moreover, quite lost upon Owen, because just then he was so full of joy it would have taken a great deal more to sober him.

"Miss Nairn has promised to be my wife, madam," he said simply, "I believe you have stood in her parents' place, and been the only mother she has ever known, so I owe it to you to tell you my glad news first of all."

"Your wife," Miss Primrose started, "indeed,



"YOU ARE VERY KIND; WILL YOU NOT COME IN?" SAID MISS FAIRN.

she is far too young, and if you are Professor Chester, I don't think conjuring (though very clever and amusing) at all certain enough to marry on."

"But I am not the Professor," said Owen, "my name is Tudor, and I live at Diamond End. I am rich enough to settle a handsome jointure on my wife, and to give her every comfort."

Miss Primrose started.

"You are an English country gentleman, and you would marry that poor child whom her own mother has disowned; you would make my poor little May, who has actually become a shop-girl, because she was too proud to accept help from me—your honoured wife?"

"That is my desire," said Owen, unconsciously quoting the prayer-book. "May is my life's love, Miss Primrose, and I assure you she shall be as honoured and respected as though she had half the peerage for her relations."

"The relations are quite eligible on one side," said Miss Primrose. "Her mother was one of the Leighs, of Woolborough, the reigning baronet is May's great uncle."

"Do you mean I ought to ask him for his consent?" said Owen. "I think my means will satisfy him, but I would far rather not apply to a relation who has never shown my darling a single kindness."

Miss Primrose shook her head.

"There is no need for you to ask his consent, the family threw off Mona entirely when she married Henry Nairn. I ought not to deceive you, sir; I don't speak so plainly to May herself, but I feel pretty well certain he was what one calls a bad lot."

"Miss Primrose," said Owen Tudor, simply, "there's a black sheep in every family; I am afraid there's one in mine; but May and I have agreed it doesn't matter, and we are both willing to take the risk."

The old lady's face beamed, she began to feel good times were coming for her favourite at last.

"I wonder you got her to consent, she had set

her heart on paying Mr. Page all he spent on her."

"I am going to send him a cheque in full before we are married," said Owen. "I am glad he doesn't live in England; I should not care to have my wife exposed to his slights."

"He wouldn't slight May when she was your wife," said the schoolmistress, sagely. "It's the poor and lonely, not the rich and cared-for men like him, slight; and now I'll go in to Gladys, for I expect, sir, you are wanting to say good-by to May."

It was a tender, loving farewell. Owen held the girl clasped in his arms, and kissed her as though he never meant to let her go. He forgot the troubles which only that morning had well-nigh weighed him down; forgot that his mother's husband might be alive—a murderer in will if not in deed, forgot that the family diamonds were missing, and he more than suspected his mother of helping the thief who stole them. At that moment the man's heart had room for but one thought—this was his first love, and she was his.

To very few of us is it given to marry our first love; too often time and circumstances, sometimes our own change of purpose, makes it impossible and one's first love settles down into a tender memory—a bitter-sweet recollection; but when fate relents towards the human race and suffers a man not only to marry his first love, but to rest assured he is also her first choice, too, why then their happiness is as nearly perfect as any happiness granted to mortals here below.

Owen went out into the dark, cold December night with the burden of his grief, perplexity and doubt well-nigh dispelled. May stood on where he had left her, with a strange radiance on her face.

What mattered her mother's neglect, her stepfather's cruel scorn? What mattered hard work and more than a few social snubs, since her knight loved her and had chosen her from all the world to be his own!

Since true love can gild even the commonplace

things of life so wonderfully, since it can bring such a flood of sunshine into what was a dreary waste, then why is it so rare—rarer even, it seems to me, than charity, which a poet once called the rarest thing under the sun!

(To be continued.)

THE oldest match manufactory in the world is in Sweden. Matches were made there long before the old roughly-trimmed splinter of wood, tipped with sulphur, was discarded with the tinder-boxes for which they were used. In twenty-five years the export trade of Sweden in foreign matches increased to 1,000 million boxes a year. Some of the machines for making the matches, which we use in these days, make 200 revolutions a minute each, and turn out about two millions and a half of matches daily, or about 900,000,000 annually. Rather more than 5 matches per head for the whole population are used daily in the United States. In France 200,000,000 of matches are used daily. Altogether, there are in Europe about 5,000 factories, and they yearly produce matches valued at £10,000,000 sterling.

HOLMAGEN, a Roumanian country town of 1,200 inhabitants, holds its annual fair on the feast of St. Theodore. On this occasion the place swarms with newly-married brides from the sixty to eighty villages in the district; widows who have taken fresh husbands remain at home. The young women, in festive attire, and generally attended by their mothers-in-law, carry jugs of wine entwined with flowers in their hands. They kiss every man they meet, and afterward present the jug to his lips. The person thus regaled bestows a small gift on the fair girl. Not to take of the proffered wine is regarded as an insult to the young wife and her family. She is therefore reserved before strangers, and only kisses those whom she thinks likely to taste of her wine. The kissing is carried on everywhere—in the streets, in the taverns, and in private houses.



RICHARD FALKLAND STOOD LEANING AGAINST THE COUNTER CONFRONTING MISS BELLE, HIS ARMS FOLDED ACROSS HIS CHEST.

HIS TRUE WORTH.

— 102 —

CHAPTER VI.

MISS ARABELLA TROTT—vulgarily punning as it sounds to say so—was, however, literally "trotting" about Drummerfield village, on errands of mercy and charity intent; verily a good Samaritan in petticoats.

The church-clock, at the east end of the High-street, was striking five as Miss Bella issued forth from a low cottage doorway hard by the church gates—her last packet of tea and accompanying shilling distributed, her capacious straw-basket empty at last.

Aunt Bella, hearing those five measured strokes from the ivied Norman tower, quickened her pace almost to a little run.

"I wonder whether Richard is in," said she to herself. "I shall just have time to call in at the surgery and ascertain. I want a word or two with the boy. I know that Hildegarde is in no hurry to get home. She never is"—with a displeased sniff—"when she takes herself off to the Moat House."

Miss Arabella Trott hastened on down the street, and soon came to Dr. Hobson's red and green lamp; then, catching sight of Richard Falkland's brown head above the wire blind of the dispensary window, she turned the door-handle and marched in unceremoniously—as indeed she was accustomed to do when Dick was there alone.

"Hallo, Aunt Bella—you!" exclaimed the young man cheerily, shaking back his thick wavy hair as he looked up from the tonic he was compounding; "how are the pensioners to-day?—irritable and ungrateful, I shouldn't wonder, owing to the hot weather. Sit ye down yonder, and make yourself at home."

"I will, my dear," Miss Trott replied, settling herself forthwith upon the one hard cushionless chair that the dispensary boasted, and holding her basket on her knees. "P-o-o-f, gracious

me! how stuffy it is in here. I wonder you are not suffocated, Dick—that I really do!"

"It is pretty hot, now you mention it," Richard returned, in his own cheery fashion, putting his lips, true doctor-like, to the tonic before corking the phial and sealing it up. "But I pull down the window at the top, you see, and it isn't so bad then, you know. Besides, I am used to it."

"Ah, that makes all the difference! Richard," continued the little old lady, fanning herself with her basket and fixing sharp questioning eyes on Richard Falkland's face, "when are you coming to Courtgardens again?"

The abrupt inquiry seemed almost to take the young man's breath away; but, although his hand was shaking perceptibly, he managed to put down the bottle of mixture steadily enough.

Then, with his back to the light, he stood there leaning against the counter and confronting Miss Bella, his arms folded across his chest.

He echoed her own words slowly, almost, indeed, mechanically.

"When am I coming to Courtgardens again? Well, I don't exactly know at this moment. Perhaps the next time you are good enough to ask me—and perhaps, Aunt Bella, never again."

Miss Bella continued to eye him searchingly; but the shrewd, questioning gaze was growing a trifle dim.

"Will you come to us this evening, Dick?" said she, knowing full well, notwithstanding, that she was tempting the lad in vain, yet looking greatly all the same to win his confidence if she could. "Will you, my dear? Hildegarde will make you very welcome, I need not say."

"You are very kind," he answered quietly—"but I think not this evening, Aunt Bella."

"There may not be many more chances in store for you," Miss Trott went on gravely, still watching young Falkland furtively as she spoke. "After Christmas, I know not what the arrangements at Courtgardens are likely to be. Lord St. Austell cannot bear me, you know, Dick; so in all human probability I shall not be there myself. Hilde-

garde is to be married at Christmas, you see, and his lordship himself comes then to Courtgardens."

"Yes," answered Richard courageously, but his strong white teeth were hard set as the words were uttered, "I have heard all about it in the village. That arrangement and the—and the marriage are generally talked of now, I believe."

"Ah, yes, indeed, that sort of news soon gets abroad in a place like Drummerfield," remarked Miss Bella, with her most matter-of-fact air, as she arose from her hard wooden chair, and shook out her dusty skirts. "Well, dear lad, I must be moving homeward; time is getting on; though I do wish very much that you would tell me, before I go, why it is that you cannot or will not come to Courtgardens this evening? As a rule, Dick Falkland, you do not require much pressing," she added, hardily.

It was Richard's turn now to look steadily and searchingly into the countenance of Aunt Bella. But she never once flinched under the almost stern gaze of those honest bright brown eyes of his.

"Why do you corner me like this, and inflict on me such needless pain, Aunt Bella?" he demanded reproachfully. "You already know, I am certain, why it is far better and wiser of me to stay away wholly from the neighbourhood of Courtgardens. Why do you tempt me, when I have prayed for strength to do the thing that is prudent and right? I thought that my secret was my own—besides my own self. I believed that no soul on earth knew of it, much less suspected it. How came you by your cruel knowledge, Aunt Bella?"

"I found it out," replied Aunt Bella softly.

There was no occasion any longer to beat about the bush. The little old lady had got at what she wanted now.

"And possibly other people have found it out too," put in Richard, somewhat bitterly.

"There, I think, you are mistaken, my dear. Everyone is not so sharp as I am, recollect. Call me a vain old woman, Dick, if you like—but 't's the truth, after all."

"Well, I have been a fool," said he, humbly, his chin sinking dejectedly to his breast.

"There's no doubt about that, I am afraid—not the least in the world," agreed Miss Bella, sighing. "And it can't be helped, I suppose, now! Yet even if matters were different—different in every respect—altogether and absolutely different, still would the age between you both be on the wrong side. There, Dick, lad, take my advice—be a man, and forget her!"

He raised his head then, and smiled; a brave, resolute, and yet half dreamy smile that lighted up his tanned beardless face, and rendered it quite handsome for the moment.

"Forget Hildegard!" he said—"Never!"

Miss Arabella Trott tugged back the dispensary door impatiently before Richard Falkland could perform the act for her.

"Why, Dick," said she energetically, looking over her shoulder at him, "I declare you're a greater fool than I took you to be!"

"Probably," was his good-humoured answer. Then—"Aunt Bella, mind," lowering his voice, and the tone of it was very sad and beseeching, "my secret will be safe with you? You will be silent?"

"As the grave," replied Aunt Bella impressively, as she stood there for an instant upon the surgery-doorstep, the basket of plaid straw slung once more on her arm. And then, with a brisk reassuring nod, she took her leave.

"Yes, poor boy, as the grave!" she ruminated sorrowfully, as she wended her homeward way. "Ah, Hildegard, my dear, you have riches and luxuries, a superabundance of them; you have everything that mortal can wish for, or that money can procure! And yet I am sore troubled for your future, my dear—because you have missed the nobler love!"

CHAPTER VII.

SWIFTLY the days and the weeks sped on, and every trace of the late summer was dead at last.

Gusty, shrieking, autumnal winds followed all too soon, and scattered the yellowing leaves and withered twigs over the dull and melancholy earth.

Hill and dale were alike barren and bare; the trees were stark and gaunt and the hedges brown.

Autumn is a season of sadness, and all the land, indeed, looked sad.

It was a gray afternoon with a lowering sky, a boisterous wind and ever-threatening rain.

In the library at Courtgardens sat Miss Bella and Hildegard, one on either side of the glowing hearth-place.

Miss Trott, as usual, was upright and busy with her needle, her capacious work basket upon a table close to her elbow, her spectacles astride her nose flashing in the firelight.

Hildegard, opposite, in a listless and unoccupied attitude, had fixed her beautiful eyes thoughtfully upon the ruddy logs.

She had much to think about, much to dream over, for Christmas was drawing very near; barely two months hence and the day would arrive—the all-eventful day, the fifteenth of December, that Hildegard had marked for her wedding-day.

She was very happy sometimes; and sometimes, in reactionary periods, just as horribly depressed.

Not even to herself, however, would she admit that Ughtred St. Austell, at best, was but an indifferent lover, who seldom went out of his way, indeed, to give her pleasure, who seemed to accept her own lavish love as a simple matter of course.

Recently he had taken himself off to London, to meet a bachelor friend from India—at least, so he was pleased to give out—and had remained absent from Drummerfield and the Moat House for more than ten days.

During that time he wrote to Hildegard once, and only once, and she had, not unnaturally, expected to receive a letter every day; or, at any rate, every other day.

On his return, she had ventured to reproach him in her gentle, womanly way; and he had met the reproach with one of those cool shrugs of the shoulders, which had the effect of hurting her always considerably more than she cared to show.

He had also muttered something at the time about women being selfish and exacting, and hard to please; and his injustices had silenced Hildegard on the spot.

She spent much of her time now at the Moat House with Lady St. Austell and Georgie Walmer, in talking over the impending marriage and important matters connected with it; and sometimes Lord St. Austell was at home to welcome and entertain his betrothed, and sometimes he was not—just as it happened.

Aunt Bella, in the character of looker-on, and a keen observer on all occasions, was perfectly alive to the fact that Ughtred St. Austell, in reality, since that summer day when he had come to Courtgardens and gained Hildegard's consent with regard to a speedy marriage, had shown himself more indifferent, more lukewarm than ever in his wooing, as though, it would seem, he cared little indeed for Hildegard Ray herself, now that the coveted prize—her enormous fortune—was well within his reach and as good as secured.

And Miss Arabella Trott, convinced secretly of all this, groaned in spirit and aloud to herself over the blindness of Hildegard Ray, and thought often of poor Richard and his heroic self-banishment from Courtgardens, concerning which Miss Ray had long since expressed her astonishment, without however eliciting so much as a word of explanation on the subject from discreet and loyal Aunt Bella.

The wind in fitful wallows, hollow, low, and mutterably mournful, came down the wide library chimney.

Now and then the gray and gusty rain washed over the windows and dimmed them like fog.

Miss Arabella looked up from her homely sewing, and shivers as she glanced out on the leaden landscape—the tossing bare trees and the driving rain.

"What nasty weather!" she remarked. "I don't suppose his lordship from the Moat House will put in an appearance here to-night."

"No," replied Hildegard, as though speaking against her inclination. "He explained to me last evening that I must not expect him to-day."

"And why not, pray?" demanded Miss Bella sharply. "He gave you a reason, of course!"

"Of course. He mentioned something about being obliged to go to Prince's Wroughton for the day—on—on important magistrate's business. He would dine at 'The Roebuck' with his brother Justices of the Peace," murmured Hildegard wearily. "It really does not signify, Aunt Bella, now that I know."

"It does signify—because I do not believe a word of it," exclaimed Miss Bella hotly. "He is a cold, unfeeling, unnatural—"

Hildegard winced palpably, and held up her hand.

"You are forgetting," she said gently, "what is due to me and to him. Lord St. Austell could not lie."

"Oh," said Aunt Bella, a little derisively perhaps.

And then she bit her lip, frowned, and held her peace.

Patter, patter, came the raindrops on the broad window-panes, and cheerily crackled the logs upon the hearth.

Once more the silence in the warm luxurious room was broken only by the everlasting "click" of the little old lady's needle and the loud impressive ticking of the big mantel-clock.

"Dear Aunt Bella," said Hildegard presently, her fine, clear eyes still fixed upon the glowing pine logs, "we have been very quiet at Courtgardens for some time past now—have we not?"

"Yes, my dear, I believe we have, now you come to mention it," said Miss Arabella, rousing herself to brisk interest in the subject.

"And I—and I, you know, have somehow been feeling rather dull and stupid lately," Hildegard went on, with an effort at a smile which ended in

an involuntary sigh. "I fancy it must be for the want of something definite to do—something interesting and exciting to think about."

"Gracious goodness me! Why, there's the wedding!" exclaimed Miss Bella drily. "Isn't that enough to think about?"

"Yes, of course," Hildegard hastened to say, the sensitive colour rising quickly in her cheek; "but, apart from that, it has occurred to me, Aunt Bella, that people—friends and neighbours round about—will possibly be expecting me to do something for them before I give up Courtgardens to Ughtred."

"To do something for them!" echoed Miss Arabella, not comprehending. "What do you mean, my dear?"

"Oh, in the way of hospitality and entertainment," Hildegard explained listlessly. "A ball—a *fête*—something of that description, you know."

"Humph," returned Miss Arabella dubiously.

"You will not mind, I am sure!" questioned Hildegard, always with consideration for the feelings and inclinations of others.

"Oh, not at all!" replied Miss Trott quickly. "Why should I, my dear Hildegard. You are mistress in your own house, and have a perfect right to please yourself, of course. And really I suppose, in present circumstances, it is the least you can do after all."

Then Miss Arabella added, with her swift bright little smile,—

"Bless me, you'll be fussed and gushed over enough yourself when you return to Drummerfield as Lady St. Austell."

A tender smile played about the pensive lips of Hildegard Ray.

"Ah, when I am Lady St. Austell," she was thinking, "I shall be happy then, for my dear Ughtred—my dear love Ughtred—will be always with me."

"Well, let's see now," continued practical Aunt Bella, "if you mean to give a ball, why, there's not much time to be lost. There are plenty of people in the neighbourhood now, and so the invitations had better be issued as soon as ever you have settled upon the date of the entertainment."

"Yes—we will make out a list to-morrow. Ughtred himself has many London friends whom doubtless he would wish to be invited. Of course we must consult him before anything definite is arranged."

Miss Arabella sniffed, and resumed her sewing energetically.

"I wonder," observed Hildegard meditatively, "I wonder whether we shall be able—Ughtred and I—to persuade Georgie to come. Even for one night, I am afraid, nothing would induce her to leave Lady St. Austell."

"What a dull life it must be for her, poor little thing!" said Miss Arabella compassionately. "A remarkably selfish woman I call Lady St. Austell."

"Try to think of her, rather, as a woman grievously tried and afflicted, for whom, because of her sorrow and suffering, every allowance should be made," pleaded Hildegard gently.

At this Christian rebuke Miss Arabella Trott elevated her small nose disdainfully, just by way of reminding Hildegard that she—Aunt Bella herself—was by no means a warm adherent and partisan of the proud old family at the Moat House.

And thus it came about that the heiress of Courtgardens determined to feast and delight her neighbours—the last festival, indeed, that the beautiful Hildegard Ray would give and preside over in her maiden name.

CHAPTER VIII.

THIS sending forth of invitations from Courtgardens for a large ball on the fourth of November—that was the date which Hildegard and Lord St. Austell between them had at length decided upon—was creating quite a stir, a sensation, indeed, throughout the neighbourhood of Drummerfield.

Cards of invitation had gone to the substantial

stone house with the red and green lamp in the High-street—one for Richard Falkland, and another for Dr. and Mrs. Hobson; the latter being asked by the kindly-hearted Hildegard as a sort of compliment to poor Dick.

The Hobson couple themselves had accepted with alacrity; for Mrs. Hobson had never in her life been within the walls of Courtgardens; hitherto, indeed, had never had the chance of going thither; and now that the opportunity—an excellent opportunity of gratifying both her vanity and her curiosity—was proffered her ceremoniously, she was certainly not the woman to let it slip by if she knew it!

But Richard Falkland, notwithstanding the polite R.S.V.P. in one corner of the dainty gold-and-white card, had as yet in no wise regarded the courteous request.

The truth of the matter was, he could not bring himself to make up his mind either in one direction or the other; whether to accompany his friends the Hobsons, as they sincerely wished him; or whether to send a civil refusal, and so keep away from dangerous ground.

However, he must soon make up his mind finally. Which was it to be?

"It would be far the wiser course to stay at home," in one ear whispered prudence.

"But surely there could be no possible risk in meeting her and greeting her in a crowded ball-room!" sighed inclination in the other.

And between the two small voices, one as it were reasoning against the other, Dick Falkland's state of mind was one of helpless indecision.

The question was settled for him ultimately in a rather unexpected manner. But, anyhow, it was at the same time settled irrevocably—and that was something.

One still, gray afternoon, when the autumn mists lay low over the brown fields, Hildegard Ray was driving her spirited cream-coloured ponies, at their usual spanking pace, along the deserted country lanes on her way to the Moat House; her errand thither being to endeavour to prevail on Georgie Walmer to attend the ball on the fourth.

Lord St. Austell's own attempts to gain the same end had failed utterly, and he had duly reported his failure to Hildegard.

On turning a corner of the roadway, well within sight of the Moat House gates, Hildegard Ray beheld the well-known figure of Richard Falkland striding rapidly towards her.

He would have lifted his hat and passed on if the mistress of Courtgardens had not pulled up the ponies suddenly, the belted youth behind her tumbling nimbly off his perch in order to grasp the heads of the fiery little animals.

"How are you, Mr. Falkland? I am so glad to see you once more," Hildegard said, smiling graciously on the young fellow a heavenly smile, as she leaned over the side of the pony-carriage and extended to him her perfectly-gloved hand. "What an age it is since we met, is it not?—and why, I wonder!"

Richard, who by this time had grown uncomfortably warm, touched reverentially with his own the proffered hand, and agreed sheepishly that it seemed indeed a long while since last he had seen Miss Ray.

"And how truly unkind you have been to me!" she exclaimed then, with light reproach, "ignoring wholly, as you have done so far, my poor invitation for the fourth! Never mind, you shall give me your answer now! Oh, surely you will come to my ball, Mr. Falkland!"

Poor Dick stammered miserably, looked at his boots, and then again at Hildegard almost imploringly with those eloquent bright brown eyes of his.

"You are very good," he said uneasily; "and you must have thought my behaviour unpardonably rude. It is so, of course. But I really don't know whether—whether—"

"What is there to prevent you?" she inquired kindly. "Aunt Bella, I am sure, will be exceedingly disappointed if you do not come. And so shall I myself—I mean it."

It was of no earthly use—resist her he could not.

Even now, as he stared at her with his faithful

hopeless eyes, the blood was tingling in his every vein, and his heart was aching heavily with its burden of secret love.

And she actually looked and spoke too as if she would not like him to refuse. In fact, was not she asking him not to do so, with her own sweet lips and of her own sweet accord? How could he say her nay? It was impossible!

"No," he answered, speaking low—"there ought not to be anything to prevent me, Miss Ray; but—"

"Then you will come," she interrupted him, with another charming smile, which vanquished and routed poor Dick completely; for the ponies were showing symptoms of impatience and restlessness at this unusual delay in the middle of the road.

Then Hildegard added,—

"I am now on my way to win over someone else—someone who like yourself has said that she will not come to my dance. I allude, you know, to Miss Walmer. Recollect, Mr. Falkland—I shall expect you. Goodbye!"

The restless, cream-coloured heads were free; the ponies, with a toss of their pretty white silken manes, were off again in an instant.

The agile "tiger" sprang upward to his narrow perch behind, and the next moment beautiful Hildegard Ray and her elegant little equipage had vanished from the spot.

"And so, I suppose, I shall go after all," muttered Richard heavily, with a troubled frown. "How little she suspects the mischief of it all—and what a mistake her kindness to me is! Well, well, it will be all up with me soon. In less than two months hence I shall hear her marriage-bells, if I live. Heaven help me then!"

And Richard Falkland, due at the hovel of some lowly sufferer a quarter of an hour ago, strode on quickly to make up for lost time. To the warning voice within him, preaching so persistently those unpalatable words of wisdom, he was deaf now. Prudence and discretion had succumbed before the fire of temptation, and all poor Dick's good resolutions were scattered to the winds of heaven!

Irrelevant ideas often fit across the mind at strange times and in strange places. As Richard entered the dirty, wayside cottage, where a dangerous fever case was awaiting his attention, he thought somehow of Georgie Walmer, whom, in fact, he scarcely knew—indeed only by sight.

"I wonder what her motive can be," he was thinking, "for refusing the invitation to Courtgardens? I thought they were friends—beautiful Hildegard and she. Possibly, however, I am mistaken."

In another minute he was sitting by his patient's unwholesome bed, his own troubles and Georgie Walmer alike forgotten.

Arrived at the Moat House, Hildegard Ray went at once up to the room of Lady St. Austell. Though the late October afternoon out of doors was raw and gray, that wide low chamber, wherein the invalid passed her days, was close and oppressive to a degree.

A large fire burned in the antique grate, and there was another in the dressing-room also. The warm atmosphere was heavy with the perfume of flowers which had blossomed originally in the conservatories at Courtgardens.

By the pillows sat Georgie, in her low basket chair, with a volume of poems on her lap as usual. As Miss Ray entered softly, Lady St. Austell pulled aside the faded damask curtain with her thin jewelled hand.

"Here is Hildegard! Put the book aside, Georgie."

And Hildegard, coming forward, kissed tenderly, as she was accustomed to do, the pallid forehead of the invalid; and then took her seat by the other side of the bed opposite to Georgie Walmer.

"You are come, I imagine, Hildegard, to try to get Georgie for the fourth of next month. Ughtred prepared us for your visit," Lady St. Austell said.

"Yes," Hildegard answered. "Ughtred's persuasions it seems, have failed; but mine must do nothing of the kind. Georgie, darling, I have

set my heart upon it—and so I cannot be sent away disappointed."

"Oh, please do not ask me any more!" the young girl said, in a low, pained, frightened sort of tone, and looking entreatingly across the bed at Hildegard Ray. "Oh, please do accept my first refusal!"

"I trust that you will do nothing of the sort, Hildegard," put in Lady St. Austell, for once generous and unselfish. "I wish her to come to you—it will do her good to go to a dance. She wants a change now and then, and she should have it. I am sure it is now more than six months since she paid you a visit at Courtgardens. She says that she doesn't wish to leave me even for that one night. But it is all nonsense—all sheer nonsense. Mrs. Pratt can very well sit with me, and attend to my little requirements, as I have explained to Georgie over and over again."

Mrs. Pratt was the aged housekeeper, the mate of the ancient, purblind gardener, who swept up the leaves in the shrubberies, and indeed did little besides. The worthy pair had served at the Moat House as boy and girl together; and at the old Moat House, in the service of the St. Austells, they would spend the remnant of their days.

"Georgie," Hildegard said, earnestly, "I shall really feel much hurt if you, whom I consider my dearest and my nearest friend, refuse to be present at my ball. Nearly everyone has accepted. You have no real excuse—indeed, you must come!"

"Perhaps it is because she fancies that she has no gown and things fit to appear in," remarked Lady St. Austell, querulously. "Even if such were the case, it is a drawback that can be speedily remedied."

Georgie lifted her sweet, pale face, with its angelic halo of yellow hair, and, looking again across at Hildegard Ray, with that dumb, beseeching expression in her troubled eyes, shook her head slowly and sorrowfully enough.

Why should they all conspire to worry her so?—why would they not leave her in peace, and allow her to please herself?

It was not kind of them to force her against her will. Oh, it was very hard to bear! Georgie herself, like Richard Falkland, knew in her heart that she was best away from Hildegard's fête at Courtgardens.

And she had told Ughtred so—but how could she tell the others?

"I would rather not leave Lady St. Austell," she said tiredly, trying to speak firmly nevertheless. "Pray do not ask me any more."

Georgie had addressed herself direct to Hildegard; but it was Lady St. Austell herself who replied.

Like her son Ughtred, she could never brook opposition, physically helpless though she was. A tedious sermon followed—a sermon at once contradictory and illogical—to which however the poor child listened patiently and dutifully, yet understanding never a word of the same.

In the end she yielded and ceased to oppose; perhaps for the sake of peace, and perhaps because she was too sick at heart to hold out any longer.

Presently, unperceived, she crept away to her own room, fastened the door securely against all possible intruders, and threw herself prone upon the bed.

If Georgie had only remained firm in her determination, if Richard Falkland had but kept steadfast to his earlier resolve—if neither of these two had gone to the ball at Courtgardens—ah, then, how different might have been the future of Hildegard Ray!

In the spic-and-span breakfast parlour of the commodious stone house in Drummerfield High-street were Dr. and Mrs. Hobson and Richard Falkland.

The three were seated at the breakfast-table, which was bright with shining china and the glossiest of linen.

Everything in the room, indeed, was of the spotless and orderly kind, from the glittering steel fender, which reflected as in a mirror the fire before it, to the neat prim morning-cap, all inno-

cent of furbelow, on the top of Mrs. Hobson's smooth head.

There was that about the lady which bespoke eloquently the thrifty housewife—a something quite indescribable in the hard expression of her square healthy face, and in the rigid, almost puritanical simplicity which she affected in matters of dress.

One might read at a glance the nature of the woman—the stamp on her was indelible. A prudent, energetic manager, unquestionably, but certainly not the tender, soft-hearted mother of children!

Dr. Hobson, at his end of the table, had just opened his *Field*. On his left sat Dick, thoughtfully stirring his coffee round and round, and scanning a recent number of the *Lancet* at the same time.

Mrs. Hobson, facing her husband, was speaking of the coming ball at Courtgardens. It was a favourite topic with her—scarcely a day passed indeed that she did not find something fresh to say about it.

"The decorators from Prince's Wroughton are going there to-morrow, I hear," she was saying now, as she carefully hot-milked a cup for herself, and as carefully put into it two small tea-spoonfuls of fine moist sugar—two small tea-spoonfuls and not a grain more. "The rooms are to be magnificent, they say."

"They say! Who says so?" asked Dr. Hobson, glancing over the top of his paper just a little derisively at his stout, middle-aged, solid-looking partner.

"You wish to know who told me, doctor? Why no less a person well-informed than Mrs. Brittle, Miss Ray's house-keeper," replied Mrs. Hobson triumphantly. "I met her in Dobb's-lane yesterday afternoon, and had a long talk with her. She assured me that the place, before they'd done with it, would be turned completely topsy-turvy. Several guests from a distance will remain for the night at Courtgardens—the night of the ball, I mean. But nobody is expected on a visit to stay for the occasion, as you may say, because the place, the whole house throughout, will be so upset."

"And what else, pray, did you hear?" inquired the doctor sarcastically—"that all the folks are going in fancy costume, I suppose! In that case, you and I shall look stunning, my dear!"

"Someone was telling me," Richard hastened to put in pacifically, looking up and noting that Mrs. Hobson's solid red cheeks were fast growing ruddier, "that the Lefevres from Prince's Wroughton were expected, and Admiral Lee and his daughters, all the way from Middlehurst."

"And that is perfectly correct, Mr. Falkland," Mrs. Hobson said gratefully, reflecting what a grand thing it would be, later on, to be able to say honestly to all her Drummerfield set that she had met these smart people on the social footing of equality—"and also the Earl and Countess of Quarrylands; possibly the Bishop of Eilchester himself; but decidedly Lady Mountstuart and her granddaughters who are staying just now at the Palace."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Dr. Hobson, but without looking over the top of his *Field* this time.

"A little more coffee will you take, Mr. Falkland!" asked the doctor's wife blandly, ignoring the doctor himself and his exasperating exclamation into the bargain.

"Thank you. A week to day will be the eventful fourth, you know, Mrs. Hobson," Dick reminded her genially.

"So it will, to be sure!" cried she. "Mrs. Brittle informed me yesterday that your aunt, Miss Trott, is extremely anxious and indefatigable over everything concerning the arrangements, but that Miss Ray herself takes matters very calmly and coolly. But then, that is scarcely to be wondered at, you see, Mr. Falkland, when she has plenty of other things to absorb her time and thought. It won't interest you, of course, not being a lady, to know that the whole *trousseau* has been entrusted to a first-rate court milliner and dress-maker in Prince's Wroughton, the celebrated Miss De Gussett, you know; when quite finished and ready for packing, I have been actually invited to inspect it, Mr. Falkland."

"To inspect what?" stammered Richard, hardly knowing however what he said.

"The wedding things of Miss Hildegarde Ray," replied Mrs. Hobson, bridling importantly. "Oh—ah—yes—I see," mumbled Dick, taking with a hand that trembled in spite of him the cup that Mrs. Hobson was extending for his acceptance.

"And speaking of dress, doctor," the lady went on, in a key rather shriller as she looked down the table towards her husband, too intent just then upon her own private affairs to mark Richard Falkland's transient discomposure, "reminds me of the state of my own wardrobe. I must say again, as I said last week, that you ought to give me a brand-new gown, either satin or silk, to go to Miss Ray's ball in."

Dr. Hobson, at this declaration, peered over the top of his paper once more.

"What did you say?" he demanded.

Mrs. Hobson repeated her statement with emphasis, adding—

"Goodness knows, it isn't many new gowns that I get in a twelvemonth! Is it, Mr. Falkland?"

"I haven't noticed, really, Mrs. Hobson," returned Richard, frankly, thus unexpectedly appealed to. "But upon my word, I may say this—you always look, to my thinking, Mrs. Hobson, remarkably neat and nice."

The young man was by this time no stranger to these passing tiffs between husband and wife; and indeed it was no unusual thing for Richard Falkland, with his sweet and equable temper, to judge between them on occasion. His part was the casting of the oil upon the waves that were troubled.

"It is extremely kind of you to say so, I'm sure," Mrs. Hobson said; "but then you are always kind to me, Mr. Falkland, and I'm grateful to you for your consideration. Doctor!"

"Well?"

"What about it?"

"What about what?" said Dr. Hobson provokingly.

"Oh, doctor, you know as well as I! My gown for Miss Ray's ball," answered the poor wife pathetically.

"Oh, hang the gown and Miss Ray's ball, too," cried the brute of a husband, viciously. "Didn't I tell you the other day that we'd see about it soon? I want to read this article in peace—why on earth can't you let me!"

"See about it soon!" echoed the lady grimly.

"A likely story, that, when the time is going fast, and every moment is of consequence! Ah, Doctor, you were always a close man—remarkably close as regards your pocket"—patting her own significantly by way of illustration. "I am saying—but I'm not mean. No one, I don't care who they may be, can accuse me justly of stinginess. Now, honestly—can they, Mr. Falkland?"

"Oh, no!" cried Dick, of course.

"There, doctor, you hear—"

Here someone knocked timidly at the door of the breakfast parlour, and the domestic bickering, for the time being, ceased. A prim housemaid entered, her morning attire as spotless and severely simple as that of her energetic mistress.

"What is it, Sarah?" demanded Mrs. Hobson, sharply.

(To be continued.)

THE laying down of mahogany roadways sounds almost like a dream of oriental magnificence, but it is what the Paris municipal council are engaged in at the present moment. A portion of that almost interminable thoroughfare, the Rue Lafayette—that portion nearest to the Eastern of France railway terminus—has been pulled up, and workmen are laying down blocks of real Brazilian mahogany of a peculiarly fine texture and colour. It is confessedly an experiment, as the mahogany is dearer than the woods ordinarily used for the same purpose. Mahogany, however, is not as dear as it used to be. The actual cost of the new roadway will be fifty francs a square meter, which is considerably less than two pounds a square yard. It is hoped that the extra outlay incurred will be more than compensated for by greater durability.

LADY RAVENHILL'S SECRET.

—35—

CHAPTER XVI.—(continued.)

NELLIE HILL had a tongue in her head, like most of her sex, and asking her way, pushed on at a pretty smart pace—up one lane, down another, the night getting pitch dark, the rain getting heavier, and the horse gradually becoming lammer and lammer every instant.

She was bewildered, tired, wet, and cold, when the long, dark, seemingly endless road was illumined by a light—a twinkling light in a window about fifty yards ahead. It was close to her now; and with great alacrity she sprang off her lame horse and hammered on the door with the handle of her whip.

Her knocking was promptly responded to by an old man in corduroy knee-breeches and grey woollen stockings, with a guttering candle in his hand, and a blank, ill-tempered expression of face.

"What's up now?" he demanded, peevishly; but seeing a lady, and hearing her pitiful tale, he changed his tactics, and motioned her to go in beyond and talk to Rosie. He would see to her horse, and take the stone out of his hoof, and send a boy with her to show her the way.

There were two rooms off the passage, and seeing a light through the half-open door of one, and hearing a stream of gay, light-hearted conversation from that direction, she walked boldly in, and found herself in a bright, warm, cheerful kitchen, with a huge log fire roaring up the chimney.

Beside the fire, in a low wooden chair, sat Rosie Waller, looking radiant, in front of it; in his red coat, his wet boots stretched out towards the blaze, sat her husband, completely at his ease, and on the floor beside him Rosie's child—a boy of nearly two. The infant was playing with his hunting-crop.

What a picture!—and they had been talking in a confidently low tone. What a start Lord Ravenhill gave—a guilty start—when he was aware of the dripping figure in the doorway; but he soon recovered his presence of mind, and jumping up, exclaimed,—

"Mrs. Hill! What on earth has happened? Have you had an accident?"

"Oh, no; only lost my way, and my horse fell lame."

"Won't you come to the fire, ma'am!" said Rosie, hospitably bringing up another chair, "and let me dry your habit? You are drenched through!"

"No—no thank you! I must be going at once!" replied Nellie nervously.

To share the hearth with this young woman and her husband was simply out of the question. Were it raining real cats and dogs she would rather face the elements than such a situation, and without another word she was turning to go.

"But this will never do!" said Hugh, impatiently. "Let me go and see about your horse. At any rate, I'll go home with you. Sit down for half-a-second, almost thrusting her into his chair, where she sat as if stupefied, whilst Rosie bustled about to get her a cup of tea from a small black tea-pot that was brewing in the ashes.

"Drink this woman's tea!" she said to herself, as the water streamed off her under the influence of the fire. She would sooner take poison.

"He has lost a foreshoe. It is well for you you met me," said a cheerful voice, "for he never could carry you home."

"Then I'll walk!" emphatically, rising as she spoke.

"No, you will ride my horse," he replied, imperiously, "and I'll walk! But you must get dry first, and Rosie, here, will get you a cup of tea, or something. Rosie, this is one of the ladies from the Grange."

This was beyond bearing, she said to herself, in reply to Rosie's smile and half-kind of courtesy.

"No tea for me!" she exclaimed, pushing the child rudely away with a shove that sent it staggering across the hearth.

"Hullo!" cried Lord Ravenhill, catching it. "It's well I felled you, Tommy, or you would have had a nasty fall. You don't like children, I see, Mrs. Hill," he said, disapprovingly, soothing the now whimpering Tom, and drying his eyes with his own handkerchief.

"No, I hate them!" she returned, passionately.

"Oh! come now, I say, I don't believe that! No one could hate you, could they, Master Tom?" sitting him on his knee. "He is a fine little chap for two, is he not?"

To this question she deigned no answer.

"No, thank you," to Rosie, who was approaching, cup in hand, "not for me!" waving it away.

"At least allow me to dry your habit, madame," pleaded Rosie, who could make nothing of this pretty, fair, disdainful young lady, who seemed to shrink from her very touch, and who had repulsed poor Tommy so rudely.

Nellie glanced round the kitchen, and took in the scene before her. Once more the fire, the bright flames, the wooden settle, the round, black table, the old clock, her husband with Tommy on his knee, and Rosie looking as fair as Hebe herself, standing with a rather discouraged expression on her handsome face still tea cup in hand.

One moment more, and she had dashed out into the darkness, and seeing the old man leading up the black horse saddled for her, without a word she sprang nimbly on its back, seized the reins, and galloped away like one possessed into the wet and darkness.

"Keep to the left, ma'am. Keep to the left at the turn!" he shouted, hoarsely, after her. "She's mad—mad as a hatter!" muttered the old man, as he gazed after her, open-mouthed. "One would think from the look of her that she had seen the devil!"

So saying he slowly re-entered the lodge, nearly coming into violent collision with Lord Ravenhill as he did so.

"Well, where is she—the young lady? Have you changed the saddles, as I told you?" he asked, quickly.

"Yes, my lord; and the young lady was up on your horse before he was well at the door, and away down the road at a gallop, as if the Devil himself was after her! I'm thinking you've been saying something to vex her—be like—"

"Saying something to vex her. Certainly not!"

"Then maybe she saw something she did not like! Maybe she saw a devil! They are in the wood," lowering his voice.

"Nonsense! What was there to see except Rosie and Tommy and me sitting at the fire?"

"Well, then, I can think of nothing else to account for her capers in any way except she's mad or seen a devil. And, indeed, she has a method in her madness, too, for she has left you to get home on her lame and staggering horse!"

And a few minutes later Lord Ravenhill set forth on foot, leading the lame steed through the soaking, slushy road, and wondering over and over at almost every step he took what extraordinary idea Mrs. Hill could have got into her head now. But think as hard as he could, with the whole of his mind set upon the subject, he never guessed the truth.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE next morning Nellie made excuses to stay at home, whilst all the brilliant household, mounted or in carriages, set out for a neighbouring meet and luncheon party, which would employ their idle time till well on in the afternoon.

She had not appeared at breakfast; and now she sat down, buried in a little low chair, over the boudoir fire, holding a magazine in her hand, and staring intently at the glowing embers.

Would she could read some good advice there! something to tell her how to steer her life—for she felt completely adrift, and hopelessly wretched. In spite of the diamond rings on her fingers, the velvet gown on her back, she would gladly change places with the very laundry-maid that she had met on the stairs half-an-hour ago.

A firm, bold tread, a widely flung door behind her, and glancing in the glass over the mantelpiece, she saw a man enter in a scarlet hunting coat—her husband. Just precisely the very person she did not wish to see!

"Good-morning. What has brought you back so early?" she said, without rising, and only half turning her head.

"To have an uninterrupted talk with you," he promptly replied, pulling up a chair and getting rid of his gloves, hat, and hunting crop. "I wanted to see you by yourself, and to ask you what I have done that I am in your black books!"

For all answer Nellie turned her face steadily towards the fire, and held up the magazine between herself and him, as though he represented a blaze in his own person.

"Come!" he said, hitching his chair a little closer, "I mean to know. I've badgered my brains till they are in a hopeless muddle trying to think how I could possibly have offended you, and I give it up! We were friendly enough at Seabench, and here you treat me as if I were a kind of social pariah. You won't speak to me, look at me, ride with me, dance with me—you won't have anything to say to me!"

"No, I won't!" she answered, sullenly.

"And why? Surely you will tell me the reason, or perhaps, like a woman you have none," he added, stung by her voice and attitude, which were aggressive, to say the least of it. "I have a reason—an excellent reason!" she replied, looking round at last, but keeping her eyes on the floor.

"And am I not to know it?"

"No, never!" emphatically.

"Never! You are enough to try the patience of Job," he said, angrily springing to his feet. "You quarrel with me for nothing, and I have always been so anxious to please you and be your friend, and this is the thanks I get."

"Why are you so desirous of my good opinion?" she said, speaking half across the room.

"That is more than I know myself!" he answered bitterly. "Often I have tried to solve the problem why I should have liked you from the first—why I should have your good opinion—why I should seek almost against my will, as now, your society. Goodness knows it is not that you are so pleasant to me—it is not your manner, nor your looks. I can't account for it, except," with a sarcastic laugh, "you have thrown a spell over me—maybe you have an evil eye!"

"Maybe, I have!" angrily, tapping her shoe on the fender.

"Perhaps you are some relation of mine, though I don't know it!" he said, pacing the room, with his hands behind his back, and his eyes on the ground. "Do you know, it has sometimes struck me, that you have a very strong likeness to our family. It's about the mouth, and we are not a common type!" he proceeded, as if talking to himself. "However, I suppose you think I'm a raving lunatic!" he concluded, glancing at her, as she stood with her back to him, trembling from head to foot.

"A family likeness!" he was getting hot as they say in magic music—very hot. She felt her face on fire—what would he say next?

"Has your husband anything to do with this sudden dislike you have taken to me?" was the next rather startling question.

A nod was her only reply, for she had lost the present power of speech.

"I'm sure he need not place any embargo on your acquaintance with me," he proclaimed, in a much aggrieved voice. "Have I ever in any way presumed on our friendship? Have I not treated you as I would my own cousin—or—or—sister? If it was that fellow Montagu, now, he might interfere!" taking another turn up and down.

"Lord Ravenhill, you have no right to talk to me like this, and I won't have it!"

"Oh, won't you?" leaning his arms over the

back of a chair, and surveying her very coolly. "Just for once I must say my say—positively the last time! I tell you you are encouraging that fool Montagu, and making a greater idiot of him than he is by nature, and he will take an ell, two ells, if you give him half-an-inch. I know his little ways well, and I warn you—have nothing to do with him. If you were my wife I would not suffer you to speak to him, much less pass whole evenings with him behind a big fan! I did not know that that was good form, Nellie!" he concluded, reproachfully.

"Please to keep your opinions to yourself! You talk of Captain Montagu!" she cried, breathless with passion and excitement. "You say you would not allow your wife to speak to him!" laughing hysterically. "You!" with ineffable scorn, measuring him from head to foot. "Look at home. People who live in such large glass houses had better not throw stones."

"I am not aware that my glass house is more conspicuous than my neighbour's," he answered, stiffly.

"Perhaps not; perhaps it is only a cottage in a wood!" Seeing him change colour, she proceeded. "Here is your ring, sir!" tossing it on the table. "It is of no use to me, nor do I value it. Give it—"

"To whom?" he said, sternly, taking it up, but still keeping his eyes fixed on her face. "To whom shall I give it?"

"To Mrs. Derwent, or—"

"Who is taking my name in vain!" said the gay widow, appearing in the doorway all furs and velvet. "How early you came home, Hugh," she proceeded, as she came forward and unfastened her hat and boa. "Have you two been quarrelling?" she asked, in a tone of amiable inquiry, glancing sharply from one to the other with her rolling eyes.

"Oh, dear, no!" replied Hugh, moving near to the fire, and making a hole with the poker in the very heart of the embers. "What could have put such an absurd idea into your head?" As he spoke Nellie, who had the use of her eyes, though tongue-tied, saw him deliberately drop the ring into the very centre of the fire. Turning, he met her glance, and said, "There is an end of everything! I never offer my friendship twice," and, turning away, he picked up his gloves and hat, and walked out of the room with the utmost composure.

"What was he muttering?" said Connie, coming over to the hearthrug. "I'm sure you have been having a row, and what on earth are you poking out of the fire?" she cried, as Nellie sank suddenly on her knees, and began to rake out the live coals with a kind of frenzied excitement.

Her efforts were successful. In another moment the ring—blackened, but not much the worse—was restored, and evolving in the middle of the fire-shovel.

"Well! I do declare—his signet ring!" exclaimed Mrs. Derwent, with clasped hands. "And he threw it into the fire, or did you? What does it all mean? I insist on knowing!"

"It means nothing," replied Nellie, emphatically, raising the ornament into her lap with cautious, gingerly fingers. "At least, it means nothing now! Will you do me a favour, Mrs. Derwent, lifting up her scorched face to the widow, who was panting for particulars. "Do not say anything about this to anyone."

"Won't you tell Hugh you saved the ring, and give it him back?" she cried, amazed.

"No!" very shortly.

"And what are you going to do with it? Keep it as a souvenir?"

"Yes."

"Then the more fool you!" said Mrs. Derwent, with a contemptuous laugh, collecting her hat and muff, and sweeping out of the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. DERWENT'S visit had been prolonged long past the stipulated week, and so had Lord Ravenhill's; but they were really going to tear themselves away from The Grange within a day or two, despite their hostess's entreaties.

A few days after the scene with the ring, whilst Nellie was dressing for dinner, a low, but peremptory tap came to the door; and Mrs. Derwent entered, a trailing, magnificent figure in canary-coloured silk, with deep black lace flounces, and diamond stars in her hair.

This visit was an unexpected invasion—never had Nellie been so honoured before! She was standing before the glass, brush in hand, as this gorgeous apparition advanced upon her. There was something very odd about Mrs. Derwent that evening, she said to herself, as she gazed at her in astonished silence. Her face was as white as a sheet of paper; her eyes shone like two black caverns; her lips were twitching as she crossed the room, like a tragedy queen, and took up a position before the fire.

"I have dressed early, and come to pay you a little visit," she said, at last, holding out her hands over the flames, and speaking over her shoulder to Nellie.

Nellie could see that for some unknown reason the hands of strong-minded, self-controlled Mrs. Derwent were shaking like aspen leaves.

"Pray go on with your dressing, and I can chat to you all the same," she said patronisingly. "I have just heard two pieces of news. Which will you have first?"

"Whichever you please!" said Nellie, carelessly.

"I don't think either of them will please you, Lady Ravenshill!" said Conny, bringing out each word with a separate jerk.

Nellie's brush fell out of her hands with a crash that did not improve its ivory back.

"What did you call me, Mrs. Derwent!" she asked, as she stooped to pick it up, after a strangely long pause.

"I called you by your right name. What do you mean by masquerading about the world, and taking people in as Mrs. Hill!" she added, raising her voice, which was trembling with passion. "Oh, I've found you out, you see!"

"How!" beginning to brush her hair.

"By this envelope!" producing one from the breast of her dress, and holding it out to her companion, with a certain vicious triumph. "I've long been anxious to know who you were, and this envelope seems to have been blown across my path by Providence! You went to the Post-office yourself to day. You received and opened a letter there, and dropped the envelope. I saw it, picked it up, and read,—

"Lady Ravenshill, care of Mrs. Hill,
"Mockton Grange,
"Nr. Sheepenminster."

"But that proves nothing," said Nellie, quietly.

"It proves everything! From what I know of you, you are the last to open other people's letters. All give you that much justice. I have been adding two and two together all the afternoon, and I have put the puzzle together. I heard that Lady Ravenshill had recovered her sight. Never mind who told me!" with a gesture of her hand. "I heard she was living in retirement, and that she was not bad looking; and now I remember you telling me on the pier at Seabeach that I would never be Lady Ravenshill as long as you lived; and, of course, you had every reason to say so! I showed my cards too plainly that day, but—hugging her shoulders—"there is no use in crying over spilt milk. Now, what is your end and aim? Clever as I am, it has not dawned on me yet. Do you flatter yourself that you will gain Lord Ravenshill's heart, and then—grand tableaux, fall at his feet, and say—I am your wife?" she asked, with a sneer.

"No, I don't flatter myself in any such way!" replied Nellie, coolly.

"Ah! I see. We have heard of the Beauty in the Wood, and we are jealous! I was going to tell you all about her as my second piece of news; but I have been forestalled," with a mocking laugh.

To this Nellie made no reply, but began twisting up her hair, with hasty, shaking fingers.

Should she order this odious woman out of the room or not? She asked of her pale reflection in the glass why should she put up with her insults!

"What can he see in her!" demanded Mrs. Derwent, with a gesture of scorn. "A low-bred, common-looking dairy-maid! It's too frightful, and it's too true. He is actually infatuated, and he thinks nobody knows of his fair homestead; but they do, and if he were my husband I should have small scruple in exacting the part of Queen Eleanor," glancing impressively at Nellie. "What are you going to do, Lady Ravenshill?"

"Nothing," said Nellie, shortly.

"What will you give me to keep your secret, or may it be considered public property?" pulling down the corners of her mouth.

"No, by no means!" quickly. "I hope as you have discovered it accidentally you will respect it."

"It must come out, sooner or later. You won't go on like this. One day he will know; and he ought to know now!"

"Oh, no, he shall never know—not with my consent."

"Probably not; but you see, my dear, that you are in my power. It is as I please, now; not as you please!" saying her victim as a cat watching a mouse, between her long, black eyelashes.

"What will you give me to keep the secret? Come, now, make a bold bid!" encouragingly.

"What can I do! What can I give you! Oh, do have pity on me, Mrs. Derwent! What good can it do you to make me miserable! I am wretched enough as it is! All I ask is to get away from here, and hide myself."

"And never see Hugh again!" incredulously.

"And never see Hugh again!" she repeated, with tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Well, I want money! So if you will hand me over what will pay my consent of a dress-maker, I will give you my solemn word and honour never to breathe your real name to mortal without your permission! Come, that's fair enough, isn't it?"

"Yes; quite fair," asserted Nellie, faintly.

"But why do you hide your identity? You must tell me that as well," said Mrs. Derwent, as if struck by a sudden thought.

"He only married me for my money. We agreed to be always strangers. I don't want him to think"—covering her face with her hands—"that I am a spy on him, or wish to take up the position I resigned of my own free will."

"You are, excuse me, a little Quixotic idiot, Lady R—! We won't say the whole name, eh! If I were in your shoes, I should feel as if I had a ball at my feet. A wife, let me tell you, has a great deal in her power, and can make herself very unpleasant. I should bring a hornet's nest about his ears if I were in your place. Why!" walking to the window and opening the shutters. "It's snowing hard. I thought it was not far off from the feel in the air this afternoon. There's the second bell, and your eyes are as red as if they had been painted!" she remarked, with contemptuous compassion. "No man in this world is worth a tear—not even Hugh—they are all bad. I sometimes wish the race was extinct. By-the-way," pausing with her hand on the door, and gazing back at Nellie, who was galloping into a black lace gown, "I was nearly forgetting to tell you that Madame Cérise's account is fifteen hundred pounds some odd shillings, but I dare say it will be only a five-note to you, Lady R—! You can give her a cheque to-morrow before post-hour. *Adieu!*"

So saying she went out and closed the door after her.

A five-note! Nellie was staggered. Where in the world would she get the money! Her expenses were large, and, though not extravagant, she spent the whole of her allowance.

She might possibly get an advance, she said to herself, as she fastened on her ornaments, with lightning speed; but she would have to retrench, to sell her horses, to live very prudently, to save for the next year.

However anything—anything was better than having her secret told open-mouthed by Mrs. Derwent.

What awful bad luck, its having come into her hands, of all people!

"But it is just like me," said Nellie, with a kind of sob as she opened the door. "I have been born under some evil star; all kinds of

things happen to me that never touch other people; it would be a good thing if I was dead. I wonder why I was ever born!"

Her wishes and wonders were brought to a full stop by the drawing-room door; in another moment she was one of the smiling, chatting crowd who were complacently awaiting the last going.

"Who would think," she thought, glancing over at Mrs. Derwent, who was conversing on church matters with the Lord Bishop of the Diocese (Conny could adapt herself to any society), "that I have just promised that woman fifteen hundred pounds to hold her tongue!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THAT night Nellie could not sleep; she went to bed between eleven and twelve like the rest of the household, but could not even close her eyes.

The events of the last few days seemed burnt into her brain, and now it was Mrs. Derwent, now it was Hugh, who seemed enacting whole part scenes over and over again.

She gazed at the fire, watching it slowly, slowly sinking lower and lower, but the later the hour the more wakeful she felt.

She tried to divert her mind, she counted a hundred, she reckoned the pattern on the paper of the room, up and down and across, all in vain, she was as wide awake as ever.

There was nothing for it but to read herself to sleep, as she rose and hunted about the room for a book, but no book could she find, and she now remembered she had taken it downstairs to the morning-room.

The morning-room was a long way off, a very great number of twisting passages had to be travelled over between her apartment and that, but the house was quiet, she would see no one, and she would go.

So slipping on a very elegant white cashmere dressing gown, and a pair of shoes, she started, off candle in hand down the corridor, down the passage, down the stairs she crept as noiselessly as possible, and made her way to the very place where she had laid down Whyte Melville's latest novel.

How odd and empty and silent the room looked by the light of one candle!

What horrid dark corners it had! She pulled back a curtain and looked out, it was a clear starry night now; a slim young moon was overhead, and all the park lay under a thick coverlet of snow.

Ugh! how cold it looked, and what was that noise! she asked herself—a creaking in the wainscot, the swinging of an outside shutter; was it the ghost!

Her heart beat as loud as the ticking of a clock, if she saw anything she was sure she would die.

She was enormously frightened, down in the lower part of that great silent house all alone, and snatching up her candle she fled, without ever looking behind her, up the big, shallow oak stairs, along the corridor, and into the west wing.

But, alas! just as she turned a corner a malignant blast from one of the many draughts blew out her candle, and left her with nothing but a smoking wick.

She was more frightened than ever as she began to grope about, along the walls, feeling for doors, for any known landmark, and feeling in vain, for it seemed to her hours.

At last she came upon a familiar turning, and oh, joy! there was a door with a light under it—her own door—her own fire.

Without a moment's hesitation she turned the handle and walked in. It was not her room, not at all like it. Miserable wretch, she had mistaken the turning!

She was in the bachelor's wing! No gorgeous toilet-tables, cheval glasses or wardrobes were to be seen; everything was plain, masculine-looking and comfortable.

The room was empty Nellie soon discovered; the bed unoccupied and undisturbed. A dress-coat lay upon it as if thrown off in a hurry; a

fire burned upon the hearth—a fire that had evidently been banked up so hot for the night; two candles, burned nearly down to their sockets, glimmered on the chimney-piece, and a small round clock between them slowly showed out "two."

A rosy arm-chair was drawn up near the fire as if awaiting the return of the tenant of this very comfortable apartment; on the hearth rug just beside it lay a letter wide open, the first page turned upward and seeming to challenge attention.

Nellie's sharp eyes had read the first three lines almost before she knew what she was doing, for the writing was very large and plain and black.

"Dear HUGH,—I shall expect you to-night, let nothing detain you."

Nellie withdrew her eyes and stepped back as if she had seen a reptile. So this was her husband's room. She recognized it now by Rosie Walker's love-letter!

Of course he had gone to keep his appointment. Supposing she were to wait up and reproach him like the traditional wife, and save herself a large sum of money by presenting herself as Lady Ravenshill!

"No—no! not to be thought of," she said, half aloud, as she warmed her frozen hands over the blaze, in the firm conviction that she would not be disturbed for hours.

It was only two o'clock, the fire was good, the chair deliciously comfortable. She felt a kind of restless pleasure in whispering with danger; there was something very novel and thrilling in the sensation of sitting and warming herself at her husband's fire, as she would at the heat of a volcano.

Any moment there might be an eruption, but meanwhile the sensation was new and pleasant.

She became bolder and bolder as she grew warmer; she actually had the hardihood to pick up Rosie's letter in the tongue and hold it over the flame, watching it curl, then turn biscuit-colour—brown—then flame up, and finally go sailing up the chimney in lacy black fragments.

"So much for that," she said aloud, putting down the tongue and once more leaning back in the chair with her pretty little feet crossed on the fender, her arms crossed behind her head, and her eyes fixed on the clock. "I must be going soon," she muttered, "half-past two."

So saying she slowly rose and proceeded to relight her candle by one of those on the chimney-piece, and as she was in the act of doing so a kind of click, a turning of a lock, made her start and turn round, candlestick in hand.

It would be hard to say which was the most startled, her husband or herself. A door, which looked like that of a hanging closet, was wide open, and a sharp, bitter gust of wind came rushing up a corkscrew staircase after Lord Ravenshill, who started back with his eyes riveted on the white figure at the fireplace.

His face was deathly pale, his top-coat thrown wide open, and on his head a round felt hat.

Escape unseen was out of the question for Nellie, and although she and Hugh had not spoken to each other for three days—not since he had thrown the ring in the fire—yet, driven to desperation like a stag at bay, she determined to make the best of it, and on the instant had made up her mind to show a bold front, and carry off matters with a high hand.

"Please to come in and shut the door, the wind is enough to cut one in two. I must apologise for this intrusion," she added, as he obeyed her. "I went down for a book, and coming back my candle went out, and I found myself here by mistake instead of in the other wing. Oh! what has happened to your hand?" she exclaimed, seeing his shirt-sleeve and hand covered with blood.

"Only a cut," he said. "I'm afraid it's rather in a bad place, between the finger and thumb," twisting his handkerchief still more tightly round it, and sitting down on the nearest chair, as if completely exhausted.

Lookjaw was the first thing Nellie thought of as she made a movement towards the bell.

"What are you going to do?" he said, sharply.

"Remove the servants and send for a doctor," she answered, without a moment's hesitation.

"Nonsense!" impatiently. "Excuse me, but if you would not mind looking for my flask—it's on the table somewhere," here his voice became almost inaudible, and beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead.

Was he going to die, or faint, or what? Nellie rushed to the table, turned out half the contents of his dressing box, seized the flask, poured out some brandy and held it to his lips.

"There, I'm better!" he said, in a few minutes. "I'm awfully ashamed to give you all this trouble, but I've sprained my arm, I'm afraid, as well as my hand; if you could tie it up for me I should be so much obliged. You see I don't want to knock up the house," he added, candidly, "and as you happened to be on the spot—"

"Oh, certainly, I'll do it, of course," said Nellie, who had strong nerves and was bandy with her fingers. "I shall want some bandages."

"Plenty of handkerchiefs over there in that socket, and here's one," drawing another out of his breast pocket. In doing so, left-handed and awkward as he was, a bow of ribbon—a woman's bow—fell out on the table between him and his companion.

She recognized it at once—it was Rosie's—she had worn it that evening at the cottage, a pink and white checked ribbon bow, in the shape of a true lover's knot.

Nellie felt inclined to throw the token in his face, rush out of the room, and leave him to his own resources; but he looked so unconscious of any harm, so white and so haggard, that she thought better of her impulse, and proceeded to bathe, plaster, and bind his hand to the best of her ability.

He seemed in great pain from his arm, but tried to make light of it, and to smile his thanks and praises of her surgical skill.

"I think you ought to have something done to your arm," she said, imperatively. "See how it has swelled up. Your sleeve ought to be cut."

"But you can do that!" he replied, eagerly. "I don't want anyone to know that I was out to-night, if it can be helped. I was obliged to go on business—private business—and coming home in a hurry I was so blinded with the snow that, instead of jumping the wall in the usual place, I went about forty yards to the left, and landed in a stone quarry—not a deep one, but still it was a long drop, and trying to save myself I did this," holding up his wounded arm.

"Why could you not do your business in the day-time?" said Nellie, caustically.

"Impossible, in this instance," he uttered, calmly, "and I wish my outing to be kept a profound secret. Can I trust you?"—looking at her anxiously—"It is almost a matter of life and death. Perhaps that is saying too much; at any rate, it is of the most vital consequence."

"Yes, you may trust me," said Nellie. "I am rather a good hand at keeping a secret," she added, impressively. "I know more than you think; but, of course, it is no affair of mine," snipping, as she talked, all round the sleeve of his coat, and gently drawing it over his swelled and sensitive arm.

"What do you know?" he demanded incredulously.

"Oh, never mind! I'm afraid that what I know is not much to your credit, Lord Ravenshill!"

"That shows you know nothing," he said, quietly. "I dare say you will hear me accused of something that will surprise you very much; but I have no more to do with it; I am as innocent as you are yourself. I—but no matter," and here he closed his eyes, leant back in the chair, and looked as if he were going to faint again.

Between binding up his hand, and relieving

his arm, and hunting for various remedies, such as sticking plaster, eau-de-cologne, &c., time had gone rapidly.

It was nearly four o'clock when Nellie left her patient and stole noiselessly back to her own cold, dark, empty room, and crept into bed at last.

Was it all a dream? she asked herself in the morning, when her maid appeared at her side with her hot water and cup of fragrant tea in an exquisite silver cup. Had she dreamt it? she asked herself, as she rubbed her eyes.

The hunt for the book, losing her way, finding herself in the writing room, Rosie's letter, her husband's sprained arm! How could she have attended him so coolly and composedly, just as if she had been a hospital nurse! Her series of lectures had come in very useful; she had not felt in the least awkward or embarrassed as she ought to have done; but perhaps she dreamt it. She had not had half enough sleep; that was one thing very certain, she said to herself, as she turned round to take a little more slumber, whilst her maid prepared her bath and got ready her things.

"Dear me, ma'am!" she exclaimed, in a shocked voice, "how did you get all this blood over the front of your new dressing gown? Did you hurt yourself in any way?"

"Hurt myself!" said Nellie, suddenly, raising herself on her elbow and gazing at the robe de chambre, which showed a dark stain all the way down the front.

"Oh! I cut my finger with a penknife," half burying her face in the clothes whilst she delivered herself of this falsehood.

"Dear, dear me! it must have been a bad cut. Shall I see to it before you dress?"

"No, no!" thrusting her hand far under the bolster, in case Browne should come over to make a personal examination; "it was nothing. Never mind."

"That was a bad piece of work last night, ma'am; the postman brought the news," proceeded Mrs. Browne, as she shook out her mistress's evening dress with vigorous shakes.

"What was that?" inquired Nellie, with a loudly-beating heart, and a presentiment of some evil tidings.

"It was an 'orrible murder!" said Browne, withunction, doing out the information so as to make the most of it—"a terrible business!"

"A murder!" gasped her mistress.

"Yes, ma'am," putting down the dress, and warning to her subject now with arms akimbo and lengthened visage. "You've never 'eard of the young woman perhaps: she lived at the gate of Craven Park; but she got into trouble of some sort, and was packed about her business. She lived in a cottage not far from Kingsdown with an old uncle—a lonely place—"

"Well, yes; go on—get on!" cried Nellie, in a frenzy of impatience.

"And she was found this morning with her brains beaten in, and the child too!"

"Great Heavens!" ejaculated Nellie, in a smothered voice.

"Yes, ma'am, fully dressed in the kitchen—the child was in his cot; but she, poor thing, had had a struggle for her life, they say, and fought all round the room. There were bits of her dress torn out, as if she'd been fighting with a wild beast—that old uncle of hers—"

"Yes; where was he?"

"He is half-witted, you know, and no more to be depended on than 'mad Tom' down in village—a miserable, frightened, stammering gaby," said Browne, forgetting her usual elegant language in the excitement of the narrative. "He was like a log; they might have burnt the house over his head for all the good he would do! He says it was the devil."

"And have they any clue?" faltered Nellie, with her tongue cleaving to the roof of her mouth.

"I believe not, ma'am—at least, not at present; but, of course, whoever did it is not far off. It was done, they say, about two o'clock this morning, and he is safe to be caught whenever he be, before night."

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Nellie could see that for some unknown reason the hands of strong-minded, self-controlled Mrs. Derwent were shaking like aspen leaves.

"Pray go on with your dressing, and I can chat to you all the same," she said patronisingly. "I have just heard two pieces of news. Which will you have first?"

"Whichever you please!" said Nellie, carelessly.

"I don't think either of them will please you, Lady Ravenhill!" said Conny, bringing out each word with a separate jerk.

Nellie's brush fell out of her hands with a crash that did not improve its ivory back.

"What did you call me, Mrs. Derwent?" she asked, as she stooped to pick it up, after a strangely long pause.

"I called you by your right name. What do you mean by masquerading about the world, and taking people in as Mrs. Hill?" she added, raising her voice, which was trembling with passion. "Oh, I've found you out, you see!"

"How!" beginning to blush her hair.

"By this envelope!" producing one from the breast of her dress, and holding it out to her companion, with a certain vicious triumph. "I've long been anxious to know who you were, and this envelope seems to have been blown across my path by Providence! You went to the Post-office yourself to-day. You received and opened a letter there, and dropped the envelope. I saw it, picked it up, and read,—

"Lady Ravenhill, care of Mrs. Hill,
"Monckton Grange,
"Nr. Sheepminster."

"But that proves nothing," said Nellie, quietly.

"It proves everything! From what I know of you, you are the last to open other people's letters. I'll give you that much justice. I have been adding two and two together all the afternoon, and I have put the puzzle together. I heard that Lady Ravenhill had recovered her sight. Never mind who told me!" with a gesture of her hand. "I heard she was living in retirement, and that she was not bad looking; and now I remember your telling me on the pier at Seabeach that I would never be Lady Ravenhill as long as you lived; and, of course, you had every reason to say so! I showed my cards too plainly that day, but"—brugging her shoulders—"there is no use in crying over spilt milk. Now, what is your end and aim? Clever as I am, it has not dawned on me yet. Do you flatter yourself that you will gain Lord Ravenhill's heart, and then—grand tableaux, fall at his feet, and say—I am your wife!" she asked, with a sneer.

"No, I don't flatter myself in any such way!" replied Nellie, coolly.

"Ah! I see. We have heard of the Beauty in the Wood, and we are jealous! I was going to tell you all about her as my second piece of news; but I have been forestalled," with a mocking laugh.

To this Nellie made no reply, but began twisting up her hair, with hasty, shaking fingers.

Should she order this odious woman out of the room or not? She asked of her pale reflection in the glass why should she put up with her insults!

"What can he see in her!" demanded Mrs. Derwent, with a gesture of scorn. "A low-bred, common-looking dairy-maid! It's too frightful, and it's too true. He is actually infatuated, and he thinks nobody knows of his fair Rosamond; but they do, and if he were my husband I should have small scruple in enacting the part of Queen Eleanor," glancing impressively at Nellie. "What are you going to do, Lady Ravenhill?"

"Nothing," said Nellie, shortly.

"What will you give me to keep your secret, or may it be considered public property?" pulling down the corners of her mouth.

"No, by no means!" quickly. "I hope as you have discovered it accidentally you will respect it."

"It must come out, sooner or later. You won't go on like this. One day he will know; and he ought to know now!"

"Oh, no, he shall never know—not with my consent."

"Probably not; but you see, my dear, that you are in my power. It is as I please, now; not as you please!" eyeing her victim as a cat watching a mouse, between her long, black eyelashes.

"What will you give me to keep the secret? Come, now, make a bold bid!" encouragingly.

"What can I do? What can I give you? Oh, do have pity on me, Mrs. Derwent! What good can it do you to make me miserable! I am wretched enough as it is! All I ask is to get away from here, and hide myself."

"And never see Hugh again?" incredulously.

"And never see Hugh again!" she repeated, with tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Well, I want money! So if you will hand me over what will pay my cormorant of a dress-maker, I will give you my solemn word and honour never to breathe your real name to mortal without your permission! Come, that's fair enough, isn't it?"

"Yes; quite fair," assented Nellie, faintly.

"But why do you hide your identity? You must tell me that as well," said Mrs. Derwent, as if struck by a sudden thought.

"He only married me for my money. We agreed to be always strangers. I don't want him to think"—covering her face with her hands—"that I am a spy on him, or wish to take up the position I resigned of my own free will."

"You are, excuse me, a little Quixotic idiot, Lady R—. We won't say the whole name, eh! If I were in your shoes, I should feel as if I had a ball at my feet. A wife, let me tell you, has a great deal in her power, and can make herself very unpleasant. I should bring a hornet's nest about his ears if I were in your place. Why!"

walking to the window and opening the shutters, "it's snowing hard. I thought it was not far off from the feel in the air this afternoon. There's the second bell, and your eyes are as red as if they had been painted!" she remarked, with contemptuous compassion. "No man in this world is worth a tear—not even Hugh—they are all bad. I sometimes wish the race was extinct. By-the-way," pausing with her hand on the door, and gazing back at Nellie, who was galloping into a black lace gown, "I was nearly forgetting to tell you that Madame Cérise's account is fifteen hundred pounds some odd shillings, but I dare say it will be only a flea-bite to you, Lady R—! You can give her a cheque to-morrow before post hour. *Au revoir!*"

So saying she went out and closed the door after her.

A flea-bite! Nellie was staggered. Where in the world would she get the money! Her expenses were large, and, though not extravagant, she spent the whole of her allowance. She might possibly get an advance, she said to herself, as she fastened on her ornaments, with lightning speed; but she would have to retrench, to sell her horses, to live very prudently, to save for the next year.

However anything—anything was better than having her secret told open-mouthed by Mrs. Derwent.

What awful bad luck, its having come into her hands, of all people.

"But it is just like me," said Nellie, with a kind of sob as she opened the door. "I have been born under some evil star; all kinds of

things happen to me that never touch other people; it would be a good thing if I was dead. I wonder why I was ever born!"

Her wishes and wonders were brought to a full stop by the drawing-room door; in another moment she was one of the smiling, chatting crowd who were complacently awaiting the last gong.

"Who would think," she thought, glancing over at Mrs. Derwent, who was conversing on church matters with the Lord Bishop of the Diocese (Conny could adapt herself to any society), "that I have just promised that woman fifteen hundred pounds to hold her tongue!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THAT night Nellie could not sleep; she went to bed between eleven and twelve like the rest of the household, but could not even close her eyes.

The events of the last few days seemed burnt into her brain, and now it was Mrs. Derwent, now it was Hugh, who seemed enacting whole past scenes over and over again.

She gazed at the fire, watching it slowly, slowly sinking lower and lower, but the later the hour the more wakeful she felt.

She tried to divert her mind, she counted a hundred, she reckoned the pattern on the paper of the room, up and down and across, all in vain, she was as wide awake as ever.

There was nothing for it but to read herself to sleep, so she rose and hunted about the room for a book, but no book could she find, and she now remembered she had taken it downstairs to the morning-room.

The morning-room was a long way off, a very great number of twisting passages had to be travelled over between her apartment and that, but the house was quiet, she would see no one, and she would go.

So slipping on a very elegant white cashmere dressing gown, and a pair of shoes, she started, off candle in hand down the corridor, down the passage, down the stairs she crept as noiselessly as possible, and made her way to the very place where she had laid down Whyte Melville's latest novel.

How odd and empty and silent the room looked by the light of one candle!

What horrid dark corners it had! She pulled back a curtain and looked out, it was a clear starry night now; a slim young moon was overhead, and all the park lay under a thick coverlet of snow.

Ugh! how cold it looked, and what was that noise! she asked herself—a creaking in the wainscot, the swinging of an outside shutter; was it the ghost!

Her heart beat as loud as the ticking of a clock, if she saw anything she was sure she would die.

She was excessively frightened, down in the lower part of that great silent house all alone, and snatching up her candle she fled, without ever looking behind her, up the big, shallow oak stairs, along the corridor, and into the west wing.

But, alas! just as she turned a corner a malignant blast from one of the many draughts blew out her candle, and left her with nothing but a smoking wick.

She was more frightened than ever as she began to grope about, along the walls, feeling for doors, for any known landmark, and feeling in vain, for it seemed to her hours.

At last she came upon a familiar turning, and oh, joy! there was a door with a light under it—her own door—her own fire.

Without a moment's hesitation she turned the handle and walked in. It was not her room, not at all like it. Miserable wretch, she had mistaken the turning!

She was in the bachelor's wing! No gorgeous toilet-tables, cheval glasses or wardrobes were to be seen; everything was plain, masculine-looking and comfortable.

The room was empty Nellie soon discovered; the bed unoccupied and undisturbed. A dress-coat lay upon it as if thrown off in a hurry; a

fire burned upon the hearth—a fire that had evidently been banked up to last for the night; two candles, burned nearly down to their sockets, glimmered on the chimney-piece, and a small round clock between them slowly chimed out “two.”

A roomy arm-chair was drawn up near the fire as if awaiting the return of the tenant of this very comfortable apartment; on the hearth-rug just beside it lay a letter wide open, the first page turned upward and seeming to challenge attention.

Nellie's sharp eyes had read the first three lines almost before she knew what she was doing, for the writing was very large and plain and black.

“DEAR HUGH,—I shall expect you to-night, let nothing detain you.”

Nellie withdrew her eyes and stepped back as if she had seen a reptile. So this was her husband's room. She recognised it now by Rosie Waller's love-letter!

Of course he had gone to keep his appointment. Supposing she were to wait up and reproach him like the traditional wife, and save herself a large sum of money by presenting herself as Lady Ravenhill!

“No—no! not to be thought of,” she said, half aloud, as she warmed her frozen hands over the blaze, in the firm conviction that she would not be disturbed for hours.

It was only two o'clock, the fire was good, the chair deliciously comfortable. She felt a kind of reckless pleasure in tampering with danger; there was something very novel and thrilling in the sensation of sitting and warming herself at her husband's fire, as she would at the heat of a volcano.

Any moment there might be an eruption, but meanwhile the sensation was new and piquant.

She became bolder and bolder as she grew warmer; she actually had the hardihood to pick up Rosie's letter in the tongs and hold it over the flames, watching it curl, then turn biscuit-colour—brown—then flame up, and finally go sailing up the chimney in lazy black fragments.

“So much for that,” she said aloud, putting down the tongs and once more leaning back in the chair with her pretty little feet crossed on the fender, her arms crossed behind her head, and her eyes fixed on the clock. “I must be going soon,” she muttered, “half-past two.”

So saying she slowly rose and proceeded to relight her candle by one of those on the chimney-piece, and as she was in the act of doing so a kind of click, a turning of a lock, made her start and turn round, candlestick in hand.

It would be hard to say which was the most startled, her husband or herself. A door, which looked like that of a hanging closet, was wide open, and a sharp, bitter gust of wind came rushing up a corkscrew staircase after Lord Ravenhill, who started back with his eyes riveted on the white figure at the fireplace.

His face was deathly pale, his top-coat thrown wide open, and on his head a round felt hat.

Escape unseen was out of the question for Nellie, and although she and Hugh had not spoken to each other for three days—not since he had thrown the ring in the fire—yet, driven to desperation like a stag at bay, she determined to make the best of it, and on the instant had made up her mind to show a bold front, and carry off matters with a high hand.

“Please to come in and shut the door, the wind is enough to cut one in two. I must apologise for this intrusion,” she added, as he obeyed her. “I went down for a book, and coming back my candle went out, and I found myself here by mistake instead of in the other wing. Oh! what has happened to your hand!” she exclaimed, seeing his shirt-sleeve and hand covered with blood.

“Only a cut,” he said. “I'm afraid it's rather in a bad place, between the finger and thumb,” twisting his handkerchief still more tightly round it, and sitting down on the nearest chair, as if completely exhausted.

Lockjaw was the first thing Nellie thought of as she made a movement towards the bell.

“What are you going to do?” he said, sharply.

“Rouse the servants and send for a doctor,” she answered, without a moment's hesitation.

“Nonsense!” impatiently. “Excuse me, but if you would not mind looking for my flask—it's on the table somewhere,” here his voice became almost inaudible, and beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead.

Was he going to die, or faint, or what? Nellie rushed to the table, turned out half the contents of his dressing-box, seized the flask, poured out some brandy and held it to his lips.

“There, I'm better!” he said, in a few minutes. “I'm awfully ashamed to give you all this trouble, but I've sprained my arm, I'm afraid, as well as cut my hand; if you could tie it up for me I should be so much obliged. You see I don't want to knock up the house,” he added, candidly, “and as you happened to be on the spot—”

“Oh, certainly, I'll do it, of course,” said Nellie, who had strong nerves and was handy with her fingers. “I shall want some bandages.”

“Plenty of handkerchiefs over there in that satchet, and here's one,” drawing another out of his breast-pocket. In doing so, left-handed and awkward as he was, a bow of ribbon—a woman's bow—fell out on the table between him and his companion.

She recognised it at once—it was Rosie's—she had worn it that evening at the cottage, a pink and white checked ribbon bow, in the shape of a true lover's knot.

Nellie felt inclined to throw the token in his face, rush out of the room, and leave him to his own resources; but he looked so unconscious of any harm, so white and so haggard, that she thought better of her impulse, and proceeded to bathe, plaster, and bind his hand to the best of her ability.

He seemed in great pain from his arm, but tried to make light of it, and to smile his thanks and praises of her surgical skill.

“I think you ought to have something done to your arm,” she said, imperatively. “See how it has swelled up. Your sleeve ought to be cut.”

“But you can do that!” he replied, eagerly. “I don't want anyone to know that I was out to-night, if it can be helped. I was obliged to go on business—private business—and coming home in a hurry I was so blinded with the snow that, instead of jumping the wall in the usual place, I went about forty yards to the left, and landed in a stone quarry—not a deep one, but still it was a long drop, and trying to save myself I did this,” holding up his wounded arm.

“Why could you not do your business in the day-time?” said Nellie, caustically.

“Impossible, in this instance,” he uttered, calmly, “and I wish my outing to be kept a profound secret. Can I trust you?”—looking at her anxiously—“It is almost a matter of life and death. Perhaps that is saying too much; at any rate, it is of the most vital consequence.”

“Yes, you may trust me,” said Nellie. “I am rather a good hand at keeping a secret,” she added, impressively. “I know more than you think; but, of course, it is no affair of mine,” snipping, as she talked, all round the sleeve of his coat, and gently drawing it over his swelled and sensitive arm.

“What do you know?” he demanded incredulously.

“Oh, never mind! I'm afraid that what I know is not much to your credit, Lord Ravenhill!”

“That shows you know nothing,” he said, quietly. “I darsay you will hear me accused of something that will surprise you very much; but I have no more to do with it; I am as innocent as you are yourself. I—no matter!” and here he closed his eyes, leant back in the chair, and looked as if he were going to faint again.

Between binding up his hand, and relieving

his arm, and hunting for various remedies, such as sticking-plaster, eau de-cologne, &c., time had gone rapidly.

It was nearly four o'clock when Nellie left her patient and stole noiselessly back to her own cold, dark, empty room, and crept into bed at last.

Was it all a dream? she asked herself in the morning, when her maid appeared at her side with her hot water and cup of fragrant tea in an exquisite Sevres cup. Had she dreamt it? she asked herself, as she rubbed her eyes.

The hunt for the book, losing her way, finding herself in the writing-room, Rosie's letter, her husband's sprained arm! How could she have attended him so coolly and composedly, just as if she had been a hospital nurse! Her series of lectures had come in very useful; she had not felt in the least awkward or embarrassed as she ought to have done; but perhaps she dreamt it. She had not had half enough sleep; that was one thing very certain, she said to herself, as she turned round to take a little more slumber, whilst her maid prepared her bath and got ready her things.

“Dear me, ma'am!” she exclaimed, in a shocked voice, “how did you get all this blood over the front of your new dressing-gown? Did you hurt yourself in any way?”

“Hurt myself!” said Nellie, suddenly, raising herself on her elbow and gazing at the robe de chambre, which showed a dark stain all the way down the front.

“Oh! I cut my finger with a penknife,” half burying her face in the clothes whilst she delivered herself of this falsehood.

“Dear, dear me! it must have been a bad cut. Shall I see to it before you dress?”

“No, no!” thrusting her hand far under the bolster, in case Browne should come over to make a personal examination; “it was nothing. Never mind.”

“That was a bad piece of work last night, ma'am; the postman brought the news,” proceeded Mrs. Browne, as she shook out her mistress's evening dress with vigorous shakes.

“What was that?” inquired Nellie, with a loudly-beating heart, and a presentiment of some evil tidings.

“It was an 'orrible murder!” said Browne, with unction, doing out the information so as to make the most of it—“a terrible business!”

“A murder!” gasped her mistress.

“Yes, ma'am,” putting down the dress, and warning to her subject now with arms akimbo and lengthened visage. “You 'ave never 'eard of the young woman perhaps: she lived at the gate of Craven Park; but she got into trouble of some sort, and was packed about her business. She lived in a cottage not far from Kingsfote with an old uncle—a lonely place—”

“Well, yes; go on—get on!” cried Nellie, in a frenzy of impatience.

“And she was found this morning with her brains beaten in, and the child too!”

“Great Heavens!” ejaculated Nellie, in a smothered voice.

“Yes, ma'am, fully dressed in the kitchen—the child was in his cot; but she, poor thing, had had a struggle for her life, they say, and fought all round the room. There were bits of her dress torn out, as if she'd been fighting with a wild beast—that old uncle of hers—”

“Yes; where was he?”

“He is half-witted, you know, and no more to be depended on than ‘mad Tom’ down in village—a miserable, frightened, stammering gaby,” said Browne, forgetting her usual elegant language in the excitement of the narrative. “He was like a log; they might have burnt the house over his head for all the good he would do! He says it was the devil.”

“And have they any clue?” faltered Nellie, with her tongue cleaving to the roof of her mouth.

“I believe not, ma'am—at least, not at present; but, of course, whoever did it is not far off. It was done, they say, about two o'clock this morning, and he is safe to be caught whoever he be, before night.”

Nellie felt as if she was going to faint, the

room was swimming round. Who could be the murderer? Who but Hugh?

Everything pointed to him—the late hour, his absence, his return just at half-past two, his mysterious errand, his ghastly appearance, his anxiety to keep his absence secret, his saying that it was a matter of *life and death*, her bow of ribbon, the letter, his wounded arm, the cut, the scratches on his hands!

Oh! there were quite too many proofs, she said to herself, as she buried her head under the clothes.

What she herself alone could testify to could hang him. Wretch, unnatural, inhuman monster! What was his motive for the ghastly deed? A quarrel—jealousy? What—and the child too!

Nellie's face was livid—was chalk colour, as she dressed. For once in her life she ardently wished for rouge; she would have given twenty pounds for a little colour.

Browne sympathetically remarked on her mistress's appearance as she brushed her hair out and fastened her dress.

"You do look quite shocking, ma'am. This terrible story 'ave given you an upset; try a little sal volatile, it will steady your nerves."

And fortified by a dose Nellie descended late to the breakfast-table. All were assembled, and the meal was in full swing as she entered.

She had to undergo the whole recital of the murder over again. Nothing was spared her, sickening little details were added, that made her very blood turn to ice in her veins, by an old gentleman—her neighbour, who absolutely not supped, but *breakfasted* on horrors.

Nellie made a feint of eating, breaking up toast with shaking fingers, and feeling at times as if she would cry out: "There—there is the murderer!" and point a retributive finger at her husband.

He sat nearly opposite, whiter than the table, with his arm in a sling. What lie had he told the company about that? He looked ten years older than he had done yesterday, and he did not eat a morsel.

No wonder, with the brand of Cain upon him since he had last broken bread. What amazed and confounded Nellie was his insisting on accompanying Mr. Monckton to the scene of the tragedy—in spite of his arm, in spite of the weather, in spite of everything.

Mr. Monckton was a magistrate, and must take old Waller's deposition, such as it was, and view the bodies.

But what took Hugh, red-handed, to the scene of blood? Was it the extraordinary fascination that draws murderers back to the tragic spot, as Bill Sykes was drawn back to London and the rope?

CHAPTER XX.

THIS was the most awful day that Nellie Fill ever remembered; it was like a nightmare to her afterwards for years.

The gentlemen dispersed to smoke or play billiards, the ladies gathered shivering round the two great fires in the drawing-room with books and work, but they neither opened book nor put in needles; they did nothing but talk of the murder.

Who could have done it? Why they did it! When they did it, and with what?

How frightfully Lord Ravenhill took it to heart, and no wonder! It was terrible for him, and yet he was so situated he could say nothing.

And many remarked how determined he was to go with Mr. Monckton. Of course it would be awfully painful for him, but it was easy to see that he would leave no stone unturned to bring the wretch to justice. If the murderer was above ground, he would find him!

Nellie felt that she was becoming quite hysterical as she listened to all this. She would disgrace herself before everyone if she did not retire.

Mary Fortescue was most anxious to accompany her, and in spite of her, followed her up to her room, and closing the door after her said,—

"Nellie, this is all too much for you. You are

so excitable and easily wrought up. I assure you just now your eyes looked as if they were starting out of your head. Lie down and rest, and let me bathe your forehead."

"I think I shall go mad!" said Nellie, sinking on the sofa, and burying her face in the cushion.

"My dear, I did not like to say so, but now you have mentioned it yourself you really did look as if you were on the way to Hanwell several times this morning!" said her friend taking a seat beside her. "I think it is enough to try anyone's nerves, living in the house with your husband under a feigned name. It is like living in a powder-mill! Why don't you tell him, Nell, to make everything right. He is such a nice fellow."

"A nice fellow!" echoed Nellie with a groan. "That's all you know about him, my dear child! But you are right! I mean to tell him who I am!"

"You do?" jumping up. "Oh, Nellie, I'm so glad!"

"Yes, but it won't make any difference."

"What?"

"Not the least: and Molly, dear, you must tell your aunt, Mrs. Monckton, all about it. No one else need know that Mrs. Hill is Lady Ravenhill, and I should like to go home to-morrow. I can't stay here—indeed I can't!"

"Is it this shocking murder that has upset you?"

"Yes, partly."

"Of course if you like we will go, but it seems such a pity, with everything going on so smoothly and his liking you so much, not to stay and make friends."

"Make friends! You don't know what you are saying, Molly!" wringing her hands. "Make friends! if you say that again, I don't know what I shall do to you!" excitedly.

"My dear Nellie!" said her companion, soothingly, "you really are not at all well! I'll get you a composing draught, and you must take a good sleep. I'll draw the curtains and let no one in."

"Yes, a composing draught!" Nellie caught at the idea with avidity—anything to drown thought, to kill the agonising truth that seemed to be eating its way through her brain. "Go!—be quick! Get it at once!" waving her friend feverishly out of the room.

The door had scarcely closed on Miss Fortescue when it opened on Mrs. Derwent, who came in bland and smiling.

"Ah! you are quite knocked up, my dear, and no wonder. It is too shocking to be thought of!" and lowering her voice, "how awful for him. He is frightfully cut up, and no wonder! His face was absolutely grey at breakfast. Did you remark? And how his hand was shaking!"

"Don't speak of it! I'm sick of the subject," said Nellie, frantically. "I have a splitting headache, Mrs. Derwent, if you will excuse me," turning her face away from the light. "I want to go to sleep."

"Of course, certainly. I only came in, my dear, to tell you that, if quite convenient, I will take that cheque now. I want to send it off this morning."

"It is not convenient. If I was going to pay you it would not be for a week at least as it is," putting her hand to her throbbing throat.

"You don't mean to say you are going to back out of the bargain!" almost screamed Mrs. Derwent, half rising in her chair.

"Circumstances have altered the case now."

"What! since yesterday?" incredulously.

"Yes. You may tell him how, and when, you please. I am going to acknowledge the truth at last!"

"This is a very strange, sudden fancy. What is the reason of it, may I ask?" contemptuously.

"No, you may not ask; but be satisfied that there is an amply good and sufficient reason!"

"Has it anything to do with *Rosie Waller*?" said Mrs. Derwent, leaning over her and whispering in her ear, but the pretty little shell-

like ear heard no more than that, for Lady Ravenhill had fainted.

She lay as if she were dead, without breath or movement, and as if she were marble. The door, which was slightly ajar, was pushed in by Mary with her foot, Mary was carrying a bottle in one hand and a mixture in a glass in the other. She barely raised her eyes from the latter till she was beside the sofa.

"What is this!" she cried. "What is the matter! You have killed her! She is dead!"—confronting Mrs. Derwent with horror.

"Killed her!—what nonsense! She has fainted, that's all. Dead!" rising and moving towards the door, "*I wish she was!*" she muttered to herself, and with this Christian and charitable wish she calmly departed.

(To be continued.)

SOUTHERNERS have a pretty custom that deserves poetical immortality. It is well-known that when the petals of the great laurel magnolia are touched, however lightly, the result is a brown spot, which develops in a few hours. This fact is taken advantage of by a lover, who pulls a magnolia flower, and on one of its pure white petals writes a motto or message with a hard, sharp-pointed pencil. Then he sends the flower, the young lady puts it in a vase of water, and in three or four hours the message written on the leaf becomes visible, and remains so.

In Saxon and early Norman times men purchased their wives from the father, his wealth being estimated by the number of his daughters, whose simple education was completed at a trivial cost, and whose labours contributed largely to augment the family pile, as they not only prepared all the food that the household consumed, but made from flax and wool their father's clothes and their own, from which they obtained the title of "spinster;" and it was an accepted axiom among our frugal forefathers that no young woman was fit to be a wife until she had spun for herself a set of body, table, and bed linen.

THE Twenty-fifth anniversary of the invention of post-cards was celebrated recently at Vienna. The halfpenny card was not used in Britain till 1870, the year which saw also the reduction of the penny postage on newspapers to a halfpenny. But in the year before that an Austrian, named Dr. Emanuel Herman, who is still alive, invented the postcard, and it was introduced in Austria-Hungary. In 1873 it spread to Germany, and was adopted in 1880 by the International Postal Union. In Austria alone 100,000,000 cards are now used annually, the British Post Offices pass upwards of 250,000,000, and the total for the whole world is no less than a milliard (1,000,000,000).

In order to photograph reptiles in motion, they must be placed in a sort of circular canal where they can run on indefinitely. Fishes are made to swim in a similar canal filled with water illuminated from above, so that they appear dark on a light ground, or from below, so as to appear light on a dark background. Some interesting analogies may be observed between simple creeping and more complex movements. An eel and an adder progress in the water in the same way; a wave of lateral inflexion runs incessantly from the head to the tail, and the speed of background propagation of this wave is only slightly superior to the velocity of translation of the animal itself. If the eel and adder are placed on the ground, the mode of creeping will be modified in the same manner in the two species. In both the wave of reptation will have a greater amplitude, and this amplitude grows more and more as the surface becomes smoother. "In fishes provided with fins, and reptiles possessing feet, there remains, in general, a more or less pronounced trace of the undulatory motion of reptation. The gray lizard, when photographed at the rate of forty or fifty exposures per second, exhibits this clearly, and also reveals the fact that the mode of progression by means of the feet is diagonal, and analogous to trotting. This gives rise to an alternation of convexity and concavity in the body on each disc."

LESBIA'S QUEST.

(Continued from page 129.)

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTAIN CHANDOS went home with a heavy heart. On his way he had called at the police-station, and seen the Inspector, who strongly inclined to the presumption of Lesbia's guilt after he had heard the facts adduced against her.

"But her trunks were searched, and the diamonds were not found there!" exclaimed the young officer, who naturally made no mention of the real reason of the young girl's presence in the dressing-room.

"That goes for nothing, sir. Ten to one she had an accomplice outside, and just made the jewels into a parcel and lowered them down. You see she's a Londoner, and as the Squire, your father, said to me this morning when I was up at the Croft, it's very likely she's in with a gang of thieves up in town. It's my belief she took the diamonds, and more than that, there's very little hope of getting them back again."

Seeing that the man's mind was made up on the point, and argument was therefore thrown away on him, Ronald said no more.

Directly he entered the Croft he was met by Lady Vernon, who looked at him reproachfully out of her infantile blue eyes.

"You have hardly spoken to me all day!" she exclaimed, softly, but with a suspicion of tears in her voice.

"Haven't I? I have been busy over this wretched business of your diamonds."

"Yes, but not for my sake!" she returned, with a quick stamp of her foot, and an angry gleam in her eyes. "All you are anxious for is to get the release of the girl who stole them."

"The girl, who you say, stole them," he corrected, and he was absolutely startled at the change that came over her face at his words. "Yes, you are right. I am doing my best to prove her innocence."

"Because you love her!"

"Because I love her, and intend making her my wife," he replied, steadily.

She half turned away, but he could see the deadly pallor of her cheeks, the convulsive heaving of her bosom, the fierceness with which she clenched her hands, almost digging into the tender flesh with her nails. It was a revelation to him. He had always known she liked him, but it had never struck him that she seriously cared for him in this fashion.

"Her innocence will never be proved!" she breathed at last in a tone of repressed fury through her clenched teeth. "She is a thief; and she will be convicted as one. I congratulate you on your choice."

Saying which she turned away, leaving Ronald to digest her words, and to thank his lucky stars that he had not pledged himself to this angry creature, who for the first time had really shown herself to him in her true colours. How different she looked to the sweet, childish little beauty who had coquetted with him so daintily in the past!

"Why, there was something absolutely diabolical in her expression," he said to himself, "she looked capable of anything. And how jealous she is of Lesbia! She must have suspected all along that I loved her."

And then it struck him that a jealous woman is capable of anything—capable even of bringing a false accusation against an innocent rival! He started as the idea flashed upon him, and decided that he must see the lady's-maid, and hear what she had to say about the diamonds. But, first of all, it behoved him to examine the bureau, and a little later having discovered that her ladyship was out with his father in the grounds, he provided himself with the requisite tools, and went to the dressing-room, when, as luck would have it, he found Maria Warren, the neat featured young person who acted as maid to Lady Vernon. She seemed rather confused as he entered, for she was herself standing in front of the bureau, regarding it curiously.

"Trying to make out how the diamonds were

spirited away, Maria!" he said, with assumed lightness. "It is a mysterious affair altogether, isn't it?"

"Very mysterious, sir."

"And we have not got to the bottom of the mystery yet."

The girl cast a quick frightened glance at him, and turned round immediately to leave.

"Wait a minute, Maria, I have something to say to you. You need not look so alarmed. I am only going to ask you a few simple questions to which you must give me straightforward answers. First of all I want to know when you saw the diamonds last?"

The maid was silent for a few moments, pleading her apron-strings together; her eyes remained downcast, and it was quite clear that she was very confused. At last she said decidedly.

"You must excuse my answering your questions, sir. Whatever you want to hear my mistress will tell you," and before he could stop her, she ran from the room.

"That young woman knows more about the matter than she is willing to admit, and what is more, her mistress has impressed upon her the necessity of holding her tongue," said Ronald to himself, as he took out the chisel, hammer, and measure he had brought with him, and forthwith began his operations on the bureau.

The task he had set himself was not an easy one, but he brought to bear upon it a certain amount of technical knowledge that Lesbia had lacked, and at last success rewarded his efforts, and he discovered the secret recess. In spite of himself his heart beat rather quicker than usual as he took from it a folded paper, for there was another issue at stake besides that of proving the truth of Lesbia's assertion. If the document turned out to be a will in favour of her father, Reginald Tempest, then it followed that he Ronald Chandos had no right to regard himself as heir of Thorncroft—that he was, in effect, an interloper, and she and her sister were the rightful heiresses.

Yes, the superscription on the paper ran as follows:—

"The last will and testament of Henry Tempest, K.C.B., executed 15th January, 188—"

Ronald bit his lip hard, and thrusting the important document in his pocket, went downstairs, where he was met in the hall by the housekeeper, whose good-natured face wore a look of extreme perplexity.

"Anything the matter, Wilson?" he asked, pausing.

"Why, yes, sir, it seems to me a very queer thing, indeed. I have just come upon the key of the oak bureau in my store-closet—you remember it was lost, sir, and couldn't be found when the bureau was moved from the study to Lady Vernon's dressing-room, and now it's just struck me to wonder how her ladyship could have put the diamonds in the bureau when she hadn't got the key to open it!"

"Are you sure there was only one key, Wilson?"

"Positive, sir."

"Then," said Ronald, after a few minutes' thought, "fetch Maria Warren to me in the study."

Apparently Mrs. Wilson's mission was not an easy one, for Ronald had waited sometime before the maid appeared. When she did she looked half frightened, half rebellious, and remained near the door so as to be able to make her escape if necessary.

"Now listen to me," said the young man, slowly and impressively, "events have come to my knowledge which make it impossible your mistress could have put her jewels in the oak bureau after the dance last night, as she said she did. Moreover, I am assured that you know perfectly well where they are at the present moment"—the girl starts, and her pallor told him that the shot had hit its mark—"I have no wish to be hard on you, but I am resolved to find out the truth. If you help me to do this I will reward you handsomely, if you do not, I shall simply give you in charge as an accomplice in the robbery."

"But you don't think I took them, sir?" cried the maid, in genuine terror.

"I won't say that, but I know Miss Talbot did not, and I know also that they were never put in the bureau. So much I can prove, and I think it will be equally easy to find them, either in your possession or in that of your mistress."

He never took his eyes off her as he spoke, and he saw her shiver as if with dread, but she attempted no reply.

"Mind you," he went on, "an accomplice is just as bad as a thief, and is liable to the same punishment. If once the arm of the law is put in motion against you neither I nor your mistress can save you from its consequences, therefore you will do well to think whether you are wise in defying it."

His voice and manner, quite as much as his words, had an effect on the already frightened girl. She fell on her knees before him, holding out her hands imploringly.

"I am innocent, sir, I swear it, but I'll tell you all that happened, and you can judge for yourself. When my lady wears her diamonds she always has them put under her pillow for fear of burglars, and the next day they are returned to the bank. Last night I put them under her pillow as usual, and when I heard that Miss Talbot had been accused of taking them I went straight to Lady Vernon and reminded her that they had not been in the bureau at all. She promised me twenty pounds to hold my tongue about the matter, and to refuse to answer any questions that might be asked me. If I did wrong in obeying her I'm sorry, but as to the diamonds I have never so much as seen them since I undressed her ladyship last night; you may believe me or not, sir, as you think fit."

Ronald did believe her, more than that he saw at once what had really happened, namely, that Lady Vernon had brought the accusation against Lesbia out of sheer malice and that, as a matter of fact, the diamonds were in her possession at the present moment.

The curiosity of the people round about Thorncroft was much exercised in regard to the ending of what promised to be a very sensational case of jewel robbery.

After all, the diamonds had never been stolen—so they were told—Miss Talbot was innocent, and the whole affair was due to a silly mistake on the part of Lady Vernon herself—who must be an extremely foolish woman, so the disappointed ones declared.

Her ladyship left Thorncroft rather abruptly. Later on the wonderful news filtered out that Captain Chandos had discovered a will of the late Sir Henry Tempest by which he left his estates to his nephew, Reginald, and his heirs. There were whispers of a fearful scene between Captain Chandos and his father, but no one ever knew the "rights" of the case, though surmise was rife concerning it. One thing, however, was certain—the will was duly proved, and Jessie and Lesbia Tempest were declared co-heiresses of Thorncroft and the other property left by the late Sir Henry. But as it was arranged that Jessie should live with her mother in the south of France, it was deemed advisable that a division of the estate should be made between the two sisters, and Thorncroft fell to Lesbia's share, while her sister took another and equally valuable property.

Early in July Lesbia and Ronald were married, and before they set out on their wedding journey the young bride produced a legal-looking document which she thrust into her husband's hand.

"It is a deed of gift by which I make over to you everything I receive under my great uncle's will," she whispered, looking up with fond pride into his face; "and my suggestion is that your father should remain at Thorncroft as long as he lives."

Then, as he attempted some demur, she put her fingers lightly on his lips.—

"Dearest, you must let me have my way in this—it is the first favour I have asked of you on my wedding-day, and surely you will not refuse to grant it!"

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

THE angler is so absorbed in his hobby that he generally fishes with bated breath.

HS: "I have half a mind——" She (interrupting): "Really, so much as that?"

MRS. HANLEY: "Have you tried the coffee this morning, Mr. Crossgrain?" "Yes, ma'am; and it has proved an alibi."

MRS. HENRY PECK: "Bah! I only married you because I pitied you when no one else thought anything about you." Mr. Henry Peck (dejectedly): "Well, every one pities me now!"

VERISOPH: "What's the matter with Bertie?" Noodleston: "The paw deah boy is vewy bad. He was at the theatre the other evening, when a heartless wuffian in the gallery dropped a program on his head."

A SCHOOLBOY was asked how many wars Spain had in the fifteenth century. "Six," the boy promptly replied. "Enumerate them," said the teacher. "One, two, three, four, five, six," said the boy.

"Oh, sir, please, I have swallowed a pin!" exclaimed a servant girl, running into her master's surgery. "Never mind, Mary," he replied, deep in study—"never mind; here's another," drawing one from his pin-cushion.

MISS ANTIQUE (proud of her lineage): "We came over in the Mayflower, you know." Chumley (who knows nothing about the Mayflower or anything else, but who wishes to be agreeable): "Indeed, and did you have a pleasant voyage?"

HUSBAND: "Jobson wanted to know to day if you had any more of those meringues you made yourself?" Wife: "Then you must ask him to tea again." Husband: "He said his doctor wanted to analyse one."

DOLLEY: "Well, old fellow, I asked Miss Amy last night to marry me and she declined." Goslin: "Did she deliberate as though hesitating to pain you?" Dolley: "No, she produced her negative by the instantaneous process."

WALKER: "General, permit me to introduce to you my friend, Mr.—er—huc—er—excuse me, Mr.—er—er——" The General: "I know your friend already, Mr. Fuller; let me introduce you to Mr. Walker."

ARTHUR (gloomily): "I am afraid Mabel's love for me is cooling." Friend: "Have you heard from her to-day?" Arthur: "Yes, and here's her letter. She uses the word 'love' only sixteen times, and only underscores it ten."

At an inquest in a certain part of the North of England, on a man who had been drowned, the policeman giving his evidence was asked by the coroner if means had been taken to resuscitate the body. "Oh, yes, sir," he replied, after a moment's hesitation, "we searched his pockets!"

A HOPFUL SON.—Senior Partner: "I think that new traveller man of ours will make a great success." Junior Partner: "Glad to hear it." Senior Partner: "He was in the office with his wife this morning, and she didn't get a chance to speak for ten minutes."

If a coloured waiter carrying a roast turkey should drop it, what effect would it have on the nations of the earth? Ans: It would be the downfall of Turkey, the overthrow of Greece, the breaking up of China, and the humiliation of Africa.

"Are you sure you love him?" "Am I sure? Do you see this dress?" "Of course I do. What of it?" "Will you kindly tell me if it bears the slightest resemblance to the present styles?" "Well, really it—er—it——" "It doesn't!" "No." "And I'm wearing it because he likes it."

"THERE!" said the young wife proudly as she deposited the hot plate carefully on the table, "that's the first pancake that I ever made without any help, all alone myself." "So it is!" exclaimed her husband enthusiastically, looking it over critically. "And as long as it is the very first, my dear, don't you think that, instead of cutting it, it would be nice to keep it as a souvenir? How would it do to have it framed?"

DOCTOR to Gilbert (aged four): "Put your tongue out, dear." Sick little Gilbert feebly protruded the tip of his tongue. Doctor: "No, no; put it right out." The little fellow shook his head weakly, and the tears gathered in his eyes: "I can't doctor; it's fastened on to me."

PHILIPS: "What I most admired in our hostess this evening was her dignified hauteur and her air of unapproachableness; especially towards her own sex." NIXON: "Yes; she's been in a good school for that. Before Gold dust married her she was in the mantle department of a West End milliner's."

WAITER (looking in on a noisy card party in hotel bedroom): "I've been sent to ask you to make less noise, gentlemen. The gentleman in the next room says he can't read." Host of the Party: "Tell him he ought to be ashamed of himself. Why, I could read when I was five years old."

WAITER (at fashionable hotel): "What would the gentleman like to take?" Farmer: "What is there?" "We have potage printanière à la Julienne, Fricandeau de veau avec croquettes de pommes de terre, rissole de bœuf." "Indeed! Then you can bring me a plate of something that comes the nearest to roast pork."

TICKET COLLECTOR (to passenger in first-class carriage with second-class ticket): "Your ticket is second class, sir. You must pay the difference." Passenger: "The second-class carriages were full." Collector: "Yes, but there was plenty of room third class." Passenger: "Quite so. Pay me the difference, and I'll change."

TRAVELLER: "I've got some notices that I'm selling to shopkeepers everywhere. Everybody buys 'em. Here's one, 'If You Don't See What You Want, Ask For It!'" Country Tradesman: "Think I want to be bothered with people asking for things I haven't got! Give me one reading: 'If You Don't See What You Want, Ask For Something Else!'"

O'GRADY, of Company —, was invariably the last man to take his place in ranks at all formations. Last Saturday morning at inspection he astonished his first sergeant by being the first man in the ranks, drawing from him the remark: "O'Grady, I'm glad to see ye're first at last, because ye've always been behind before."

MR. DADSON (in one corner of the ballroom): "By George, that boy of mine has danced with more girls than any other young fellow in the room. He is just his father over again." Mrs. Dadson (in another corner of the ballroom): "It is just amazing to note how confident and how popular Willie is with the young ladies. His father was such an awkward gawk at his age."

"I write poetry," she said, timidly, to the editor. "I thought maybe you would be willing to give me a trial on your paper." "A trial," he said, in facetious tones, "really, now—I am no judge." "You mean, of poetry," she said, as demurely; "I guessed as much by reading your paper." And then she floated out as bashfully as she came.

A MAN was waiting his turn to be served in a Dublin fishmonger's while a little weakened old gentleman priced every fish in the shop. "How much is this—and this—and this—and this!" he asked. At last the exasperated shopwoman exclaimed: "Ah, go and out of that wad ye! It isn't fish ye want, but information!"

LIKE THOSE GIRLS.—He (reading paper): "Here's a note about an accident at White's house. The servant put some gunpowder in the fire, and she was blown through the roof." She (sympathetically): "Poor Mrs. White has so much trouble with her girls. They are always leaving her without giving notice."

DE PAINTER (earnestly): "Do you know, Miss Fairface, that whenever I find myself beside an exceedingly lovely woman my very soul leaps with——" Miss Fairface (interrupting): "Oh, oh! Mr. De Painter, really, you quite alarm me." De Painter: "Pray have no fear, Miss Fairface, for I haven't a particle of that feeling just now." Miss Fairface (trigly): "Ah, you quite relieve me, sir; I feared you had."

CLARA: "I don't know what to make of your brother. For three months after we met, he did nothing but write poetry to me." Dora: "Has he stopped that?" "Yes. Since then he has made me some nice presents, but he has even stopped that." "Hum! Let—me—see. I have it. The household pages of our newspapers have been clipped terribly of late. No doubt he is making a collection of cooking receipts. He's in earnest."

In a civil action on money matters, the plaintiff had stated that his financial position was always satisfactory. In cross-examination he was asked if he had ever been bankrupt. "No," was the answer. Next question was, "Now, be careful; did you ever stop payment?" "Yes," was the reply. "Ah," exclaimed the counsel, "I thought we should get at it at last. When did that happen?" "After I paid all I owed," was the answer.

SMEETH: "Look here, I have come to the conclusion that it is all humbug with your vegetarian principles. The other evening I was at a vegetarian club, and most of the members present were actually gorging themselves with beefsteaks!" Snookshaft: "That is easily explained. Any member arriving late on a club night is compelled to eat a beefsteak by way of punishment. Strange to say, many of our members are always late."

THE schoolmistress was showing off her pupils to some visiting friends. She had been over the same ground a day or two before, and thought she could trust them to do her credit. "Who knows what useful article is furnished by the elephant?" she asked. "Ivory," was the reply of three boys at once. "Very good. And now what do we get from the whale?" "Whalebone." "And what from the seal?" "Sealing-wax," answered Peter Sand, whose inventiveness was better than his memory.

An old lady, living at a small town in the Midlands, is extremely partial to everything of English manufacture, and provisions of English production. On entering the local grocery store a short time ago, the assistant began to expatiate on the qualities of a new blend of Ceylon and Indian tea. She, however, immediately stopped him with: "Naw, naw, young man, ye can keep yer Injun tea. Give me the same tea as I allus have, there's nothing beats a drop of good English tea."

A NEW post-office has just been opened in a small country town in Canada. For want of a more likely applicant, a farmer's son, ignorant, yet ambitious, was appointed postmaster. One day, shortly after the countryman's installation, a commercial traveller appeared at the wicket, received a letter, opened it, and produced therefrom a money order, which he immediately presented for payment. The master took the order, read and re-read it, suspiciously scrutinising the traveller from time to time over the sheet. At length he ventured—"Are you the fellow this thing talks about?" "I am," replied the traveller. "Well, have ye got anybody to identify ye?" "No, but I don't see that that is necessary," replied the knight of the road. "You saw me take the order from the letter. It could hardly be for anybody else." "I don't just know about that, boss. I want somebody to identify you. Don't take me for no jay. You may bet I know jist a little about this 'bis.'" The commercial argued the point for a while, but to no purpose. He must be identified. But how! He had never been within thirty miles of the place before. He was about retiring in disgust, and had already reached the door, when suddenly a brilliant idea flashed through his brain. Quick as thought he was back at the wicket, where the rustic stood eyeing him suspiciously. "Here," he shouted, apparently very excited, "I have it!" He tore open his coat, and produced his pocket-book. From this he took a photo. "There," he said, showing it over to the postmaster, "there is my photograph." The rustic took the card, and carefully compared the features. A bawling look came into his face. At length he vouchsafed—"Hanged if ye ain't the right man after all, mister!" And the order was cashed.

SOCIETY.

THE Queen will stay at Balmoral until the end of June.

THE Queen has deferred her intended visit to Aldershot, arranged for the 28th inst., as Her Majesty is going to Balmoral earlier than was at first expected.

THE Queen saw a great deal of Princess Alexandra and Beatrice of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, when at Coburg, the elder of whom is growing an interesting clever-looking pretty girl, and the younger is an original and amusing child.

PRINCESS ALICE's elder sister, who is married to the Grand Duke Serge of Russia, uncle to the Czarevitch, will be in the odd relationship of aunt by marriage to her own sister when the latter marries the Czarevitch.

THE Prince of Wales will give a dinner party to the members of the Jockey Club at Marlborough House on June 6th, being the evening of the Derby Day. The Marlborough House garden party will probably take place on Saturday, July 7th.

WHEN writing a letter the Empress Eugenie always uses the "diamond pen," with which the treaty of Paris was signed. It is a quill plucked from a golden eagle's wing and mounted with diamonds and gold.

It is said that men are really going to be "rational" about their dress this summer. The tail hat is actually to be banished *pro tem*, as soon as the hot weather sets in, and the waistcoat is to give place to the "cummerbund" tentatively introduced last year.

THE marriage of Princess Josephine of Belgium to Prince Charles of Hohenzollern is again postponed till Monday, the 28th inst., so as not to collide with the national fetes in Roumania. The King of Roumania has now promised to be present, and before he leaves Belgium he is to visit the Antwerp Exhibition with the King of the Belgians.

A GREAT pleasure awaited the Queen at Coburg. She saw there for the first time the tiny son of Princess Marie of Roumania, of whom his grandparents, the Duke and Duchess of Coburg, are so proud. Everybody knows how devoted the Queen still is to babies, and each fresh addition to her descendants is the object of her most loving interest.

THERE is every promise of a cheery season. Buckingham Palace, Marlborough House, and Clarence House will each be the scene of rather more than the usual entertaining, as Royal visitors will be comparatively numerous, and, happily the winter has been so much healthier than the last, that very few of the great houses are in mourning.

THE Queen was so much pleased with her stay at Coburg that she has announced her intention of returning there, all being well, next year. Her Majesty took the greatest pleasure in visiting Rosenau, where she stayed for a fortnight with Prince Albert nearly fifty years ago, and in driving to all the places in the neighbourhood to which they then made excursions.

ENGLISH governesses are no novelty in Oriental nurseries, but they have not yet penetrated so far as Afghanistan. Now, however, the Amir has sent to Calcutta for an English lady to instruct the fair members of his household in music. Abdurrahman does not, however, intend to allow any "revolt of the daughters" in his harem through the up-to-date ideas of the modern young lady, for he stipulates that the governess must be staid and elderly.

ASCR races promise to be very bright this year, and Royalty will be well represented. It is by no means unlikely that in addition to the Prince and Princess of Wales's party to be entertained, probably, at Cowarth Park, the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh and the very latest Royal bride and bridegroom will be present; the house-party at Cumberland Lodge will be a tolerably large one, and the Duke and Duchess of Connaught will have some friends at Bagshot Park.

STATISTICS.

It is computed that 950,000 dinners and lunches are served daily in London restaurants.

THE wine cellar of the House of Commons is 100 feet long, and usually contains about £4,000 worth of wine.

THE sound of a bell which can be heard 46,000 feet through the water, can be heard through the air only 456 feet.

GERMANY has 5,000,000 depositors in savings' banks: France, 4,150,000; Great Britain, 3,750,000; Italy, 1,970,000; Austria, 1,850,000; Switzerland, 1,600,000; Sweden and Norway, 1,570,000.

GEMS.

PLEASURE is far sweeter as a recreation than a business.

THE secret of success in life is for a man to be ready for his opportunity when it comes.

POVERTY is the only load which is the heavier the more loved ones there are to assist in supporting it.

IN many instances the man who spends his life in waiting for his ship to come in, wastes his time because he originally omitted to send any ship out.

THE finer the nature, the more flaws will it show through the clearness of it. The best things are seldomest seen in their best form. The wild grass grows well and strongly one year with another; but the wheat is by reason of its greater nobleness liable to a bitter blight.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BREADED EGGS.—Boil hard and cut in round thick slices; pepper and salt and dip each in beaten raw egg, then in fine bread crumbs and fry in butter, hissing hot. Drain off every drop of grease and serve hot.

MACAROONS.—Quarter pound almonds, quarter pound sugar, two small whites of egg. Skin the almonds dry, then chop up finely, and dry in the oven for a time, and pound them. Beat the whites up very stiffly, add the sugar and almonds quickly; put a sheet of paper on an oven shelf, put the mixture on it in small teaspoonfuls, and bake in a slow oven till quite hard.

A BATTER FOR FRUIT FRITTERS.—Mix the yolks of two eggs with a tablespoonful of sweet oil, an even saltspoonful of salt, and a tablespoonful of lemon juice. After mixing these ingredients add a cup of flour, and little by little a gill of cold water. The batter may now be set aside or the whites of two eggs beaten to a stiff froth may be stirred into it at once. If it seems too thick add another white of egg. It must be just the proper consistency to coat the fruit thoroughly.

SWISS TART.—Six ounces of flour, three ounces butter, one ounce sugar, one yolk, in little water. Put these in a basin, rub them together, and make into a firm paste with the yolk, and a little water. Roll out and line an ashet or a tart ring. Then nicely stew a pound and a half of apples or a tin of peaches or apricots, and put them on the dish. Put in a very slow oven and bake, cool a little, and beat up the whites of three eggs, add one tablespoonful sugar and decorate top of the dish with this; put in a very slow oven to get yellow.

LOBSTER PATTIES.—Make delicate puff paste; roll out an inch thick. With a tin cutter cut out in cakes, and lay on greased paper. Brush over with a very little beaten yolk of an egg. With a smaller cutter press a circle nearly through each patty and set on for twenty minutes. Have the oven very hot, and set them in until a light brown. Take out and remove the top crust very carefully, taking out with a spoon the unbaked portion. Set the patties back in the oven to dry. Fill with creamed lobster, put on the top crust, and serve.

MISCELLANEOUS.

By using a microphone, you can hear a fly walk.

INDIANS believe that mirages are caused by evil spirits.

MANY years ago, in Scotland, capital punishment was by drowning.

CHIMNEYS were first put on houses of more than one storey in Italy in 1347.

OUT of the total valued exports of Africa, diamonds and ostrich feathers account for six-sevenths.

THE first printers used to print only on one side of a page, and then pasted together the two blank pages to give the impression of one leaf.

STEEL is rapidly superseding iron for use in boiler work. Steel tubes are being made now by a German by punching the pipes from hot metal.

ONE hundred years ago the Japanese were so separated from the remainder of mankind that so far as any intercourse was concerned they might almost as well have inhabited the moon.

MARIE ANTOINETTE's lace shawl, which she gave on the scaffold to her father confessor, the Abbé de l'Orme, is still in existence at the church at Neuendorf.

THE British Museum has books written on bricks, tiles, oyster-shells, bones, and flat stones, together with manuscripts on bark, on leaves, on ivory, leather, parchment, papyrus, lead, iron, copper, and wood. It has three copies of the Bible written on the leaves of the fan palm.

ONE secret of the willow's marvellous tenacity of life is to be found, perhaps, in the fact that it sends its roots a long way in search of moisture. It was discovered, after an important aqueduct had caved in, that its walls were cracked and filled for many feet with roots. These roots came from willows at least thirty feet distant.

THE Shah of Persia is superstitious. He always carries with him when he travels a circle of amber, which is said to have fallen from Heaven in Mohammed's time, and which renders the wearer invulnerable; a casket of gold, which makes him invisible at will; and a star, which is potent to make conspirators instantly confess their crime.

A CURIOUS organ is to be seen at the Jesuits' Church at Shanghai, China. It was manufactured by a native, a "brother coadjutor" of the Jesuit order. The pipes of the instrument are in bamboo wood instead of metal, and the sonority is of an incomparable sweetness, "angelic and superhuman," says a correspondent, and such as has never been heard in Europe.

ARTIFICIAL eyes are supplied to all the world from Thuringia, Germany. Most of the grown inhabitants of some of the villages are engaged in their manufacture. Four men usually sit at a table, each with a gas jet in front of him, and the eyes are blown from glass plates, and moulded into shape by hand. The colours are then traced in with small needles, no set rule being observed in the colouring; and, as every man uses his own fancy, no two artificial eyes, therefore, are exactly alike.

THE hours of dining and the time of retiring at night have, it would appear, been undergoing a constant change in Britain, at well as in other countries, in the course of the last few hundred years. The fashionable folk of Edward IV.'s Court rose with the lark, despatched their dinner at eleven o'clock, and shortly after eight were wrapped in slumber. In the Northumberland House Book for 1512 it is set forth that the family rose at six in the morning, breakfasted at seven, dined at ten, and supped at four in the afternoon. The gates were all shut at nine, and no further ingress or egress permitted. In 1670, at the University of Oxford, it was usual to dine at eleven o'clock and sup at five in the afternoon. The dinner hour, which was once as early as ten o'clock, has gradually got later and later, until now it would be thought very eccentric in the fashionable world to sit down to table earlier than half-past six o'clock, while others extend it to nine or ten o'clock.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

V. X.—The recipe is a patent.
LOTTA.—We have not got the recipe.
E. B.—That is gambling and illegal.
T. B.—Morrison was captured in Assam, starting.
BOLE.—No house is needed for using boxing gloves.
INQUIRER.—In 1875 Easter Sunday fell on March 23th.
N. C.—Only on special occasions. The prospects are good to a persevering and painstaking man.
ANXIOUS ONE.—If he will not move consult a solicitor.
JESSE.—No trouble in posting music to any British colony.
ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—Calcutta is five hours fifty-three minutes ahead of British time.
EDWIN G.—The agreement you suggest would have no legal effect.
PUZZLED TED.—Full dress—white tie, studs, and gloves—is permissible.
INQUISITIVE ERNE.—The golden crested wren is the smallest bird in the world.
BERTHAM.—The national debt of the United Kingdom is £271,042,842.
CONSTANT READER.—The book has commonly been attributed to Professor Seeley.
LONDON LARA.—The Irish motto, "Erin go Bragh," means "Ireland for ever."
INFORMANT.—Madame Patey was contralto; Madame Tatti, Italian, is a soprano.
R. B.—We are not aware of any office that insures seamen's clothes.
A MOTHER.—A boy cannot leave the navy until he has completed his twelve years' service.
FLORA.—Knives and forks were not in general use until the seventeenth century.
W. D.—The Duke of Wellington was Premier of England for two years and 301 days.
BLACK-EYED BRENDA.—Dress to suit your complexion; that makes a handsome woman of a brunette.
ORANGE BLOSSOM.—One large handful of chips is sufficient for a pint and a half of water.
DOUBTFUL HARRY.—A marriage at a registry office is not as legally binding as any other.
S. S. E.—You are certainly entitled to compensation and should put the matter in the hands of a solicitor.
ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—We do not give recommendations through our columns.
BETH.—"Noblesse oblige," "Rank imposes obligation." Pronounced "no-bless-o-bleege."
HUBERT.—You can have a copy made on application; the charge depends upon the length.
FIREBOLT.—Only a solicitor can tell you how to proceed, or give you an estimate of the probable cost.
PERPLEXED ONE.—If there is no son, the freehold property would be divided equally among the daughters.
THOUBLED ADA.—They are no doubt moth maggots. The stuffings should be removed at once and boiled or baked.
AN OLD READER.—The best course is to write to the Government Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broad way, London, S.W.
HOUSEWIFE.—The best way to use it is to render it down among other scraps of fat and use it for frying; for this it does quite well.
ANXIOUS INQUIRER.—A blind man does not require to pay license for a dog that leads him about, but for a watch dog he pays.
R. S. T.—For the necessary information ask at the Post office, where you can get a paper stating terms, &c.
DISTRESSED VANDA.—Paraffin is said to quicken the scalp better than most specifics, but we have no personal knowledge of the application.
L. G. J.—If the judge is convinced that failure to pay is wilful he can commit the debtor to gaol for contempt of court.
FRED'S LITTLE WIFE.—Tomato soup may be made especially good by the addition of a few slices of orange just before serving.
ERQUETTE.—At such a dinner no gloves are worn, nor is the rule regarding dress very strict; frock, walking, or dress coat may be worn.
FRANCIS F.—You can put barbed wire on side of post next your own ground if you put plain wire on side next your neighbour; that is legal.
INQUISITIVE ONE.—The rate of the growth of human hair varies. In some cases it has been known to exceed two inches per month. The average for man and woman is about half-inch every thirty days.
ROBIN M.—No peer can be elected a member of the House of Commons, unless he is an Irish peer. No member of either House can speak in debate excepting in the House to which he belongs.

POOR SAM.—A Turkish bath is often beneficial when the system is down and out of sorts; best in spring, of course, when outdoor air is most invigorating and fresh.

ONE WHO WANTS ADVICE.—Shirts put away for any length of time laundered are much more likely to turn yellow than those which are simply washed.

F. H.—Cannot put "by appointment to Her Majesty or Government" without license, obtainable from Lord Chancellor without incurring heavy penalty.

M. G.—Use a hard white spirit varnish, a very thin coat laid on with a soft camel's hair brush and dried quickly in a warm room.

WORRIED CLARA.—To keep stews and soups add a good pinch of carbonate of soda to every quart, and it will not turn sour so quickly as usual.

A. A.—If you refer to a cement for fastening iron or steel to stone, it is made with glycerine and litharge stirred to a paste. It hardens rapidly and is insoluble.

H. B.—"Burghley House, near Stamford town" is one of the seats of the Marquis of Exeter, one of whose predecessors was created Baron of Burghley in 1571.

PHILIP.—Mocambique is a Portuguese settlement, very unhealthy to Europeans, along coast especially; the products are sugar, coffee, indigo, drugs, fire timber, ivory, gold dust, &c.

POOR MADON.—Your nervousness may never be cured, but should it be it will be by schooling yourself diligently in what you shall do and say in event of meeting persons or being spoken to.

TIED.

SQUIRE PINKINS thinks that his son Bill
 Has got er pile o' brains,
 An' so in egerstia' him
 He takes er heap o' pains.

Th' doestrick schule want good enough
 To furnish Bill his knowledge,
 An' so his father took him out
 An' sent him off ter college.

Wall, durin' on vacation time
 Bill strutted round one day,
 Where o' Rube Jenkins an' m'self
 Was spreadin' madder hay;
 An' when Bill see o' Rube, he give
 Er assy kind o' lad,
 An' asked him how his "taters" was,
 An' "How about that calf?"

This didn't rile o' Rube er bit,
 Then Bill tried ter be grand,
 An' used big words he thought, you know,
 We couldn't understand.
 He talked 'bout everything, I guess,
 On this terrestrial ball,
 Jest as er youngster will, ye know,
 That thinks he knows it all.

Wall, when he'd gone, I sed ter Rube,
 "Bill thinks he's quite er lad;
 Ter hear that younger's foolishness,
 Say don't it make yer mad?"
 "Not mad," says Rube, "although I'll own
 His ways can't be admired.
 But then his talk don't make me mad,
 It only makes me tired."

B. T. W.

A MUSIC LOVER.—Beethoven became deaf, and long before his death could not even hear the drums in the orchestra. He never heard the greatest of his own compositions.

ONE IN DOUBT.—A clergyman should be addressed thus: Rev. A. B. Smith, M.A.; and a medical man as A. B. Smith, Esq., M.D. (if holding that degree) or surgeon.

Q. T.—It is customary to agree to let the prisoner go free when he offers himself, or is induced to become Queen's evidence, provided he is not the actual instigator of the crime.

D. C.—Go over leather with "glair," made by beating white of egg into froth, letting it settle, then adding a drop or two of vinegar and applying with a camel hair brush.

PHILLIDA.—It is a matter that no one can answer without knowing the style of the person. On general principles, a simple knot at the back of the head with the hair slightly waved, would be desirable.

L. L. P.—Rugman's Roll was the name given to the rolls of deeds on parchment in which the Scottish nobility and gentry subscribed allegiance to Edward I. of England in the year 1296.

ROTHIE.—We know of no liquid that will of itself make the hair curl, but if the hair be put in curls with the curling tongs, it may be kept in curl a long time by applying to it flaxseed boiled to the consistency of paste.

M. R.—The bamboo reed to which you refer grows in Japan and China. Of the bamboo in China there are sixty-three principal varieties, which are more valuable than her mines, and, next to rice and milk, yield the greatest revenue.

WONDERING WALTER.—The originator of the famous three "r" alliteration, "reading, riding, and rithmetick," was Sir William Curtis, a Lord Mayor of London. In 1795 he proposed it as a toast before the Board of Education.

REGULAR READER.—Give the cat a teaspoonful of castor oil, pressing mouth open by squeezing in cheeks with forefinger and thumb, then putting spoon well into throat; wrap a blanket round animal leaving only its head above.

P. D.—Puppet is a name signify a child-like image; a doll. A puppet-show is a mock drama performed by puppets moved by wires, originally intended to please children. They soon became a diversion for adults, and are still popular in China and India.

TRIOUBLED DORIS.—Have a little patience with this young man, and he will turn out all right. Let him see that his odd ways are not pleasing to you, and show him that he does not do himself justice by indulging in these little caprices of manner.

FARM VIOLET.—If you have tried the many advertised remedies and found them of no use we are afraid we can tell you of nothing that will rid you of these harmless but troublesome insects. We can only say keep everything about you scrupulously clean. 2. Try what a little borax mixed with the starch will do.

LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."—A child born at sea is of the nationality of its parents. Captain reports birth at first port where there is Consul, who in turn reports to Registrar-General London, who in turn reports to the registrar of the district where father was born.

FAIR-HAIRED FLEDA.—Some use paraffin oil, perfumed, rubbed into roots as a means of exciting growth; others prefer a moderate sized onion (not Spanish), cut into small squares, put into a pint bottle filled up with best gin, let stand for twenty-four hours, then regularly rub upon scalp.

BOB.—Unless you have an aptitude for drawing and some knowledge of the higher mathematics, it is hardly advisable for you to engage in the study of this profession, as it is one that holds out little promise of success to others than those that have a special talent for it.

OLD SUBSCRIBER.—If the postage stamp is stuck on correctly it means "I desire your friendship;" if sideways, it asks, "Do you love me?" If the head is put downward it says, "Write no more," and if placed on the wrong end of the letter it means, "Write at once." There is a larger list of variations, but the foregoing is reliable and not so complicated.

S. F. S.—You can try by sponging it with warm water, squeezing out the sponge and using fresh water every time so as to remove as much as possible of the stuff you should not have put in. Do not have it sloppy, but sponge off all surface moisture, and when still damp, but nearly dry, with the warm palm of your hand rub in castor oil.

FOUR YEARS' READER.—Lay it on a table and rub it well with bran made moist, but not sloppy wet, with warm water; use for the rubbing a piece of flannel, and rub till quite dry; then using a piece of muslin, rub with dry bran, thoroughly shake and dust out, and plentifully sprinkle with powdered camphor and strong white pepper mixed, before you put it away.

RODRIK F.—Love, based on generosity and unselfish consideration for its object, is pretty sure to win in the long run. That which is conducted on the highway, man's plan of stand and deliver rarely meets with the hoped-for success. Either let the young woman alone or show her by your manner that you desire to make yourself worthy to be loved. In the latter event you probably will get your heart's desire.

CLEMENZA.—Sold the cage in which they are confined, and make the perches of red cedar wood. A piece of new white flannel hung in the cage at night next to the perch, so that it will shade the bird from the light, will be found the next morning covered with the mites. Wash out the flannel, and continue to do so every morning until the birds and cage are entirely free from the pests.

ROSELINE.—Take quarter pound of rice and wash it well and put it in a saucepan with one breakfast cup of water. Let it boil five minutes, then add one breakfast cup of milk and boil for twenty minutes with the lid on. It must never be stirred. Keep it on a moderate fire and let it alone. Then put in one tablespoon of sugar and stir well. You may add flavouring you like. Put it in a wet shape and turn out. To make a pudding boil the same way, but add a teaspoon more milk. When it is ready stir in one egg and the sugar, and put in a pudding dish and brown in oven.

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